


Television

April 2018

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From the CEO



Last month's RTS Programme Awards were a glittering success. I am very grateful to the evening's host, the highly versatile Vernon Kay, who presented with flair and alacrity!

Thanks, too, to David Liddiment, the night's MC, Wayne Garvie, Chair of the Programme Awards, and to all the jurors, who, I know, worked so hard behind the scenes on their verdicts.

Congratulations to the winners, and my thanks to our principal sponsor, Audio Network. It was a high-spirited, exhilarating night, and wonderful to see so many industry leaders present in the Great Room at Grosvenor House.

Outside London, our centres have

been busy delivering some marvellous events. The RTS East Awards, now in their second year, returned to Norwich University of the Arts. Attendance figures were up and, for the first time, the event incorporated the RTS East Student Television Awards.

Talking of young, upcoming talent, this month's *Television* has a progress report on the first cohort of the RTS's Bursary scheme, launched four years ago. Anne Dawson spoke to six of the students who have since graduated, and found out how their professional lives are developing. Their experiences make fascinating and encouraging reading.

I am delighted that the inestimable Simon Schama somehow found the time to write the TV Diary. Simon is

indisputably one of Britain's greatest broadcasters. Like his programmes, his diary crackles with intellectual energy and passion. If you haven't watched his episodes of BBC Two's *Civilisations*, I urge you to do so: his enthusiasm for great art radiates off the screen.

Also in this issue, Andrew Billen meets one of the doyennes of British TV drama, Jane Featherstone. Her story is an unusual one and her prodigious talents are making a huge success of Sister Pictures, building on her fantastic track record at Kudos.

Theresa

Theresa Wise

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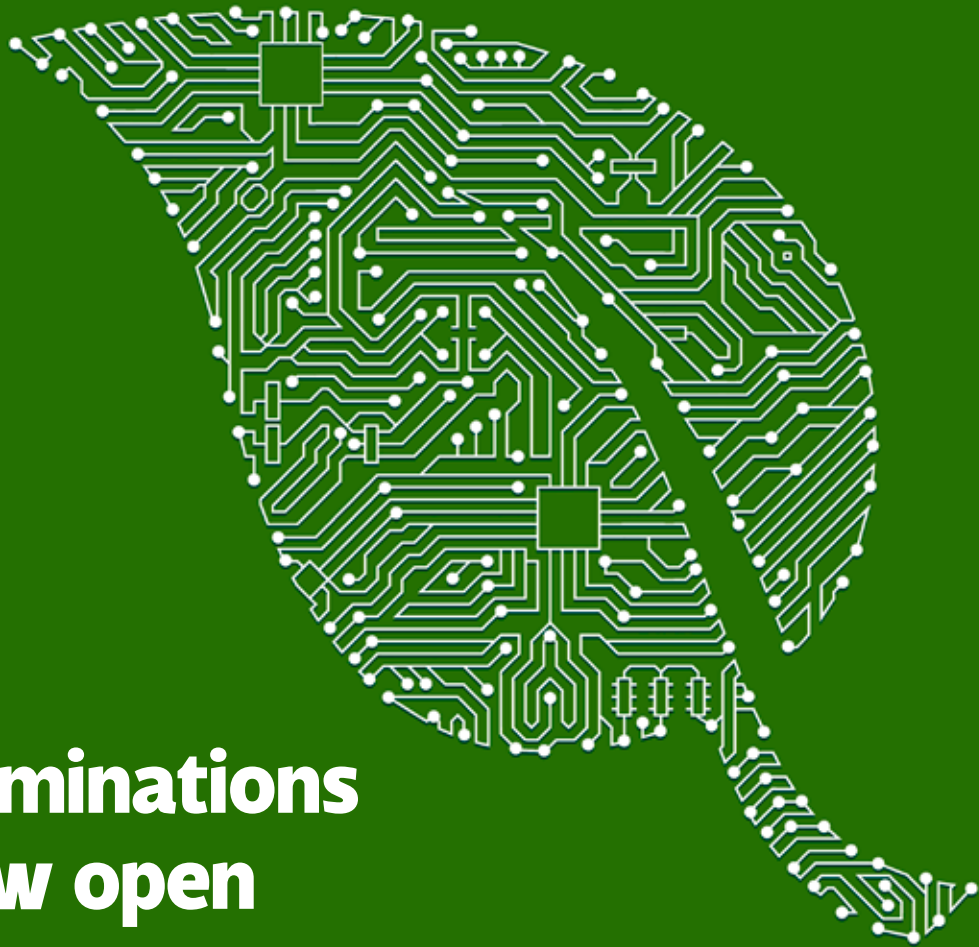
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RTS YOUNG TECHNOLOGIST 2018



Nominations now open

Applicants for the RTS Young Technologist Award can be from any sector of the TV and related industries

The judges will be looking for an application that demonstrates how:

- The applicant has already made an impact in this field
- The receipt of the award would enhance the applicant's understanding of the ever-changing role of technology in television and related fields
- The applicant proposes to share this enhanced understanding with others, both within the RTS and beyond

The prize is a full conference place at IBC, together with costs of travel to IBC and accommodation for the duration of the conference

Application forms and judging criteria are at:
rts.org.uk/YoungTechnologist2018

Deadline: Completed forms must be returned to Jo Sampson (JSampson@rts.org.uk) by 5pm on 14 May 2018.

Finalists will be interviewed on the afternoon of 4 July 2018

National events

RTS EARLY EVENING EVENT

Tuesday 24 April

Diving beneath the waves - the making of *Blue Planet II*

Speakers: Mark Brownlow, series producer; Katie Hall, production manager; and James Honeyborne, executive producer. Chair: Torin Douglas. 6:30pm for 6:45pm

Venue: Kings Place, 90 York Way, London NW1 9AG

RTS FUTURES

Wednesday 25 April

From idea to pitch

A development masterclass, where you will learn how to create new ideas (or bring ones you already have), turn them into a winning treatment and successfully pitch to a commissioning editor.

Join top development producers, responsible for programmes such as *Love Island*, *Hunted* and *999: What's your Emergency?* and many more, for a fun and interactive session, with the opportunity to pitch your ideas in teams. 6:45pm for 7:00pm
Venue: Channel 4, 124 Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2TX

RTS AWARDS

Friday 22 June

RTS Student Television Awards 2018

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

RTS CONFERENCE

Tuesday 18 September

RTS London Conference 2018

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

RTS MASTERCLASSES

Tuesday 13 November

RTS Student Programme Masterclasses

Venue: IET London, 2 Savoy Place, London WC2R0BL

Wednesday 14 November

RTS Craft Skills Masterclasses

Venue: IET London, 2 Savoy Place, London WC2R0BL

RTS AWARDS

Monday 26 November

RTS Craft & Design Awards 2018

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

Local events

BRISTOL

- Belinda Biggam
- belindabiggam@hotmail.com

DEVON & CORNWALL

- Jane Hudson
- RTSDevonandCornwall@rts.org.uk

EAST

- Nikki O'Donnell
- nikki.odonnell@bbc.co.uk

LONDON

Wednesday 2 May

Gaming and TV: What's the score?

Panelists: Steve McNeil, writer, comedian and streamer; Sam Pamphilon, actor, writer and comedian; Julia Hardy, presenter, journalist and broadcaster.

Chair: Ellie Gibson, journalist and author. 6:30pm for 7:00pm

Venue: ITV London Studios, Upper Ground, London SE1 9LT

Wednesday 16 May

AGM

at 6:00pm followed by:

AI in broadcasting: Added insights and creative help

Panelists: Cassian Harrison, channel editor, BBC Four; Lisa Perrin, CEO, creative networks, Endemol Shine Group; Ian Whitfield, CEO, Virtual AI; and George Wright, head of internet research and future services, BBC R&D. Chair: Martyn Whistler, lead analyst, EY. 6:30 for 7:00pm

Venue: ITV London Studios, Upper Ground, London SE1 9LT

- Daniel Cherowbrier
- daniel@cherowbrier.co.uk

MIDLANDS

Thursday 10 May

Indie drop-in day

We'd like to meet as many local independent production companies as possible and find out about your projects and what you would like the RTS to do for you in the Midlands. 11:00am-3:00pm

Venue: Colmore Club, 85-89 Colmore Row, Birmingham B3 2BB

- Jayne Greene 07792 776585
- RTSMidlands@rts.org.uk

NORTH EAST & THE BORDER

Tuesday 24 April

AGM

6:00pm
Venue: BBC, Barrack Road, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE99 1RN

- Jill Graham
- jill.graham@blueyonder.co.uk

NORTH WEST

- Rachel Pinkney 07966 230639
- RPinkney@rts.org.uk

NORTHERN IRELAND

Tuesday 20 March

Student Television Awards

Venue: The Black Box, 18-22 Hill Street, Belfast BT1 2LA

- John Mitchell
- mitch.mvbroadcast@btinternet.com

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

- Charles Byrne (353) 87251 3092
- byrne.cd@iol.ie

SCOTLAND

Wednesday 9 May

RTS Scotland Television Awards 2018

Hosted by presenters Jennifer Reoch and Des Clarke. 6:00pm drinks reception; 7:00pm ceremony, followed by hot buffet

Venue: The Old Fruit Market, Candleriggs, Glasgow G1 1NQ

- Jane Muirhead
- scotlandchair@rts.org.uk

SOUTHERN

- Stephanie Farmer
- SFarmer@bournemouth.ac.uk

THAMES VALLEY

Wednesday 25 April

Diversity in the broadcasting industry

Speaker: Sadie Groom. 6:30 for 7:00pm

Venue: TBC

Thursday 3 May

NAB Review

Venue: TBC

Friday 23 November

2018 Winter Ball

7:00pm

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

- Tony Orme

- RTSThamesValley@rts.org.uk

WALES

Thursday 26 April

AGM

7:00pm

Venue: Cameo Club, 3-5 Pontcanna Street, Cardiff CF11 9HQ

- Hywel Wiliam 07980 007841
- hywel@aim.uk.com

YORKSHIRE

Wednesday 25 April

Masterclasses: How to get a job in TV

Teams from True North and Lime Pictures will hold two 75-minute, video-rich masterclasses, with lots of opportunities to ask questions. Held in association with the Creative Cities Convention, which students will have the opportunity to participate in (and to attend the networking drinks on the opening evening).

Places are free but you must book in advance with Victoria Griffin (07880231626/ victoriajgriffin@gmail.com). Group bookings from universities and colleges are preferred. 2.00pm start

Venue: Leeds College of Music, 3 Quarry Hill, Leeds LS2 7PD

Friday 6 July

Annual Awards

Venue: TBC

- Lisa Holdsworth 07790 145280
- lisa@allonewordproductions.co.uk



Diving beneath the waves

The making of Blue Planet II

24 April

6:30pm for a 6:45pm start. Kings Place, 90 York Way, London NW1 9AG

Mark Brownlow, Series Producer

Katie Hall, Production Manager

James Honeyborne, Executive Producer

Torin Douglas (Chair)

Booking: www.rts.org.uk



TV diary

Simon Schama reflects on filming *Civilisations*, and recalls a critical encounter 25 years ago with a sound recordist



Episode five of *Civilisations*, “The Triumph of Art”, will air on BBC Two tonight but I’ll be 5,000km away, at home in the Hudson Valley, multitudes of tiny emergent frogs piping down in the hollows, the last grimy mounds of slush surrendering to spring, and “Play ball” at last being shouted in baseball grounds all over the country.

■ The distance is just as well since what I mostly do, when I see my own programmes go out, is carp. How did I let that champagne-glass soft focus get through the edit? Did I under-saturate the Matisse cut-outs in the grade? And – always – the words of an old sound man, more than a quarter of a century ago, witnessing a very long piece to camera in front of *Las Meninas* come back to haunt: “You’re good...” long pause “but you’re no Dr Bronowski.”

■ Who would argue with that? Not me. It can always be better. But, over the course of two years of filming, there were moments (as there always are if you’re lucky and just let self-consciousness go) when the performance and the words did seem to do justice to the art.

This almost always happens in front of works you think you know

well or have even filmed before, and suddenly you notice something absolutely fresh, which makes the whole experience innocent again.

■ That’s how it was with the little figure of a stocky peasant woman, trudging home, stooped beneath an enormous pile of firewood across her head and shoulders that Bruegel included in his *Hunters in the Snow*, a figure which, more than the exhausted hounds stuck in the drifts, seemed to embody emblematically the hard side of the human condition.

■ In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger made the unarguable point that television – especially the cutaway details we choose and the way we deploy them in the edit – usurps the human eye, capable of seeing the whole picture as well as the details all at once.

Actually, I’m not sure that is true of how we optically register a painting, but, in any case, I don’t think it’s necessarily a bad thing for television to bring viewers into focused engagement with what may have been an overlooked detail, which can turn out to have mighty interpretative power.

Very often in our series it was the micro rather than the macro that delivered breathtaking illuminations: the 4cm-long Mycenaean agate seal stone of two athletic warriors locked in mortal combat, somehow carved

on a tiny surface at least 700 years before Homer wrote his epics; or the pointed stabs of white paint from which Van Gogh formed his ecstatic starbursts over the Rhône.

■ For presenters (at least for this one), every scene re-viewed comes with crowded memories of the shoot: tribulations along with happy pay-offs. Such as the jib that came late to Chartres Cathedral and with just a single operator, who was then bound to take many excruciating hours to get it operational so that we could film the stained glass. There was the clock, mercilessly ticking down on our bought time. But then, as if in compensation, a jumbo jib arrived in Würzburg (along with a small battalion of German operators), letting us film Tiepolo’s mind-blowing, superpopulated ceiling fresco in ways technically impossible for Kenneth Clark’s crew a half-century ago.

■ In the end, you have to let go, stand back, and ask yourself: did you deliver on the promise of bringing to the small screen ennobling beauty, fresh ideas and the burning marks of human creativity in all its miraculous complexity? And the answer has to be: well, we did our best.

Simon Schama is a historian and broadcaster.



RTS BURSARIES 2018

Do you need help funding your degree course?

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- Mentoring from experienced people working in the industry
- Membership of the RTS
- Affiliate membership of The Hospital Club

Steve Hewlett Scholarship

The Steve Hewlett Scholarship, worth £2,000 per year, plus the networking, events and membership benefits of the RTS Bursaries, is awarded annually to a student who has applied for the RTS Television Production and Journalism Bursary and who has a particular interest in documentary and current affairs.

RTS Technology Bursary

Open to students studying courses in computer science, electrical and electronic engineering or general engineering, with an interest in a career in television.

- £1,000 per year during your course to support living and study expenses
- Unique access to industry visits, internships and industrial placements
- RTS masterclasses and events
- Membership of the RTS
- Affiliate membership of The Hospital Club

Applications and terms and conditions:

www.rts.org.uk/bursaries



When an ostrich gored Johnny Cash

What happens when you give writers with big imaginations a kernel of truth? Sky Arts' *Urban Myths*, that's what – charming, half-hour comedies that dramatise true, or “true-ish”, tales from the worlds of Hollywood, music, arts and literature.

The second series – which features stories ranging from Agatha Christie's 11-day disappearance to the first

Content

Lisa Campbell gets the low-down on the latest batch of Sky Arts' *Urban Myths*, the series where truth trumps accuracy

meeting of the teenage David Bowie and Marc Bolan, and Johnny Cash duelling with an ostrich – airs this month on the channel and on-demand. A third instalment is in the pipeline.

The latest series has been upped to eight episodes following the success of last year's five-parter. Those stories included Muhammad Ali talking a suicidal stranger down from a ledge; Samuel Beckett befriending a young André the Giant in rural France; and Cary Grant introducing renowned psychologist Timothy Leary to LSD. ▶

➤ Ironically, the launch of *Urban Myths* last January prompted something of a myth itself, with the casting of Joseph Fiennes as Michael Jackson provoking the ire of his daughter, Paris. She claimed it was “obviously intentional... to be insulting”.

The narrative recounted an alleged road trip that Jackson took across America with Elizabeth Taylor and Marlon Brando. Alongside complaints from Jackson’s family, there was a Twitter backlash and the show was subsequently shelved.

Whether or not you agree with the choice of casting, Sky’s head of entertainment and director of Sky Arts, Phil Edgar-Jones, stresses that the intention across all three series has been to create “an affectionate portrayal and to respect the talent they’re exploring”.

He adds: “They are predominantly warm stories that you want to tell someone else.” That is why the Salvador Dali episode in the latest series doesn’t dwell on his sexual obsessions but on his artistic temperament. The emphasis is on likeability and irreverence. Nevertheless, there are no plans to reverse the decision on Jackson.

To say *Urban Myths* got off to a great start is to understate the impact of the very first show, *Bob Dylan: Knockin’ on Dave’s Door*. Possibly the most popular episode, or certainly the one that “shone a light on the series”, according to Edgar-Jones, it tells the story of the iconic folk-rocker dropping by the home of Dave “Stewart”, one half of the Eurythmics, or, as it turns out, Dave the plumber.

As well as being beautifully performed by Eddie Marsan, the hilarious dialogue from writer Neil Webster encapsulated all the poetry and absurdity you’d want from a Dylan story. And, as is common to all these tales, you’re left not giving a damn about historical accuracy, you just want it to be true.

The eminent American folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand described an urban myth as having “a strong basic story-appeal, a foundation in actual belief, and a meaningful message or moral”. Whether every episode of *Urban Myths* lives up to this description is a matter of opinion, but the emphasis is on a lightness of tone and a sense of intrigue.

Who wouldn’t want to imagine what happened when Agatha Christie went missing for 11 days, prompting the police to draft in crime writers Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Dorothy L. Sayers? Or discover just how bizarre the encounter really was between



Salvador Dali and rocker Alice Cooper? Or find out what happened when an unassuming, middle-aged man called Kev (Philip Glenister) gave rap legends Flavor Flav and Chuck D, from Public Enemy, a lift in his Ford Focus?

Such diverse stories also have the benefit of attracting a diverse, and impressively high-profile, range of talent in front of and behind the camera.

According to Sky comedy commissioner Tilusha Ghelani, who was responsible for three of the eight new episodes, part of the appeal is the creative freedom that Sky Arts affords. One of the joys for her as a commissioner is that this series offers a perfect place to grow talent: “For some of the indies, this is their first narrative piece.”

Given that dramas have famously long lead times, these relatively quick-turnaround episodes are often used as calling cards for independent producers, adds Ghelani. She credits them with achieving a cinematic look, despite budgets at around a quarter of

a typical terrestrial drama budget.

“There’s something about their short-term nature that helps gear up an indie’s ambition to say, ‘What’s the most we can achieve in the four-day shoot?’”, she suggests. “And because we’ve had such a high standard of cast, indies have risen to the challenge of finding really big names.”

Among the stars of series 2 are Jack Whitehall and Luke Treadaway, playing Bolan and Bowie, respectively. Christie, meanwhile, is played by Anna Maxwell Martin, wonderfully accompanied by Bill Paterson and Rosie Cavaliero as a crime-writing comedy double act who deserve a series of their own.

While they could both have benefited from David Suchet’s Poirot to help solve their mystery, Suchet instead takes on Dali. Playing alongside Sheila Hancock and Noel Fielding, his manic, wide-eyed stare, flamboyant hand gestures and invented language perfectly encapsulate this most eccentric and unsettling of characters.



Marilyn Monroe and Billy Wilder

Suchet says that he was attracted to the part having been “a huge fan of the series”, adding: “I never imagined I’d play Dali. It’s one of the most extraordinary roles I’ve ever been offered.”

Like other actors in the series, Suchet was also won over by the quality of the scripts penned by a range of comedy writers. But he acknowledges the challenge of recreating these unique characters in just half an hour: “How do you play this guy? I watched every documentary and listened to his voice for hours and hours and couldn’t believe anyone could be like that.

“It’s one of the few jobs in nearly 50 years that I’ve done where I didn’t ask questions. [Directors] Jane [Pollard] and Iain [Forsyth] said ‘Do it’ and I said ‘OK’. It was as surreal as that.

“I realised that I could never know who he was so I deliberately didn’t want to pigeonhole him. I wanted to take him as seriously as he took himself.”

Gemma Arterton stars alongside James Purefoy in *Marilyn Monroe and Billy*

Wilder, replaying the 47 takes it took to say: “It’s me. Sugar!” in *Some Like It Hot*.

A life-long fan of Monroe, Arterton sought to give a sense of her complexity – her humour, her vulnerability, but also the inner strength that emerged from a troubled upbringing.

By the time she came to the set, she’d read four biographies. She admits however, that the climate of #metoo almost made her think twice, given the casting-couch culture in which Monroe was forced to operate.

“I was worried about that,” says Arterton. “Then, I thought, this film is a moment in time, it doesn’t address that stuff but it does address the issues around being a woman on set – and she played in to that, too. I decided that she couldn’t help herself... because that’s all she’d known.”

For Zoe Rocha, the producer of *Marilyn* and *Backstage at Live Aid*, managing the limited budgets meant restricting the action to one location and “being very straight with everyone that there

isn’t a massive pay packet, but there is a great story.

“You also have to be very fluid on set and adapt as you go along, so a strong relationship between the producer, writer and director is vital so you get as much value as you can on-screen.”

While Sky Arts does not attract huge ratings, the measure of success for Edgar-Jones is the long tail. His hope is that a new audience will come to these and also discover the first series.

Also indicative of how well they are working for the channel is the fact that Edgar-Jones plans to make feature-length versions of some of the stories.

“There’s space in the market for doing creative work without having big budgets, and going back to the idea that making TV is fun,” he argues. “Philip Glenister talked of returning from the set every night with a spring in his step.

“We try to create the ethos at Sky Arts that you don’t come to us to make money, but you come to indulge your love for the arts and for the medium.” ■

The king of US cable

Redacted image

Profile

Kate Bulkley finds out what makes Comcast head **Brian Roberts** tick and why his company is attempting to buy Sky

A lot has been written about a recent taxi ride that may change the face of UK television. Brian Roberts, the CEO and Chair of US media and technology company Comcast, was visiting London when he asked his cabbie for his opinion of Sky TV.

It may have seemed like an innocent question, but the driver was so effusive about Sky that, so the story goes, the next thing you know, Comcast was launching an audacious £22bn bid to buy the UK-based pay-TV giant.

Not only did the Comcast offer for Sky come out of the proverbial blue, but Roberts actually topped the £18.5bn bid already on the table from Rupert Murdoch, who was trying, yet again, to buy the 61% of Sky he did not already own.

But the story doesn't end there. Roberts' intervention threw not one but two spanners into the works: not only did he offer more money for Sky than Murdoch, but Comcast's bid also put into some jeopardy Murdoch's

separate deal to sell most of 21st Century Fox (including the Sky shareholding) to Disney for \$66bn.

It turns out that there's more to this story than was first reported, and the details provide an interesting insight into what makes Brian Roberts tick.

Anyone who knows him well would understand that his dedication to the company which has been his life's work means that even a cab ride is an opportunity to learn and, in this case, threaten to send the global media world into a spin.

His interest in Sky began long before the taxi ride. But back then – just like everyone else in media – he did not have Murdoch, who built Sky from nothing into one of the world's biggest pay-TV companies, down as a seller.

Roberts was especially interested in Sky because it is both a content company and a sophisticated distribution business focused on pioneering technology. That's a combination which appeals to him.

As a graduate of the Wharton School

of the University of Pennsylvania, one of the US's top business schools, the 58-year-old executive knows his numbers, but is also something of a tech geek.

Roberts appreciates the importance of technological advances in making cable TV a better service. Over the past three decades, he has served three terms as Chair of CableLabs, the US cable industry's research and development consortium.

Indeed, in 2010, when Comcast unveiled an EPG that paired its set-top box to an iPad, turning the latter into a TV remote control, Roberts was only too happy to show off what was then a state-of-the-art product.

Roberts also "revels in everything British", says a colleague. He visits the UK several times a year because London is the HQ of NBCUniversal International, which contributes 9% of Comcast revenues and whose assets include Carnival Films, the producer of *Downton Abbey*.

On the weekend of that taxi ride, Roberts was in town for an entirely different reason – to help woo the COO of Virgin Media, Dana Strong, to leave her job and work for Comcast; the Virgin executive accepted Comcast's offer.

It's the kind of story that Roberts' father, Ralph, is likely to have appreciated. Roberts snr was a big believer in the personal touch, a management style that was much in evidence when he founded what became Comcast in 1963.

"Comcast is a massive company and yet it feels like a family company and that's because of the way Ralph and Brian ran it together for so many years," says Kevin MacLellan, Chair of global distribution and international at NBCUniversal. "That family bond permeates the company. They are concerned about the work-life balance. Not that Brian doesn't drive us to work hard, but he is one of the very few very senior executives who very regularly asks me how my family is. I haven't had bosses who did that before. And I don't even work for Brian."

Ralph Roberts was already 43 when he and two friends bought a tiny company in Tupelo, Mississippi. The firm was putting up a giant antenna to pull in broadcast signals of TV channels based in nearby Memphis, Tennessee, to sell to local citizens.

The "retransmission" business was the beginning of cable TV in the US. Alongside Ted Turner, the founder of CNN, Bob Magness and John Malone of TCI, and Charles Dolan of Cablevision,

HE HAS A GREAT STRATEGIC MIND AND HE PLAYS TO WIN LIKE NO ONE ELSE

Ralph Roberts was one of the business's pioneers.

Brian Roberts had always wanted to work for his father. He spent weekends at the company when he was a teenager and joined it full time after graduating from Wharton.

Roberts snr put his son through a de facto training course. Working across the US from Flint, Michigan, to Trenton, New Jersey, he did everything from putting up power cables and selling HBO subscriptions door-to-door to working in the billing department.

Comcast was a name that Ralph invented by putting "communications" and "broadcasting" together. The name seems even more prescient now that Comcast is not only the biggest US cable TV operator, but also the US's biggest broadband provider. In the last quarter, Comcast added 350,000 broadband subscribers. Since August 2017, Comcast has also offered mobile services.

Via NBCUniversal, Comcast owns 21 channels including NBC, CNBC, Syfy and US Spanish-language network Telemundo.

"I remember getting a phone call and hearing that Brian had acquired the rights to the World Cup in 2018, and it just took our breath away. That move changed the whole perception of Telemundo, especially for advertisers," says David Zaslav, President and CEO of Discovery.

With cable TV in the US under pressure from Netflix and AT&T's DirecTV Now, which offers fewer channels at lower prices, Brian Roberts is keen to "pivot the company to have a rapid deployment of new products that will delight and surprise" customers.

The bond between Roberts and his father remained remarkably close even as Brian gained more control at Comcast. He became President in 1990, at the age of 30.

In 2002, Roberts took over as CEO and became Chair in 2004. However, Roberts snr, then 84, maintained an office next door to his son, separated by a glass door, where he was available for consultation and advice. "We worked as

partners until the day he died," Roberts said in an interview in 2017. Ralph Roberts had passed away two years earlier, aged 95.

Brian Roberts is tall, wiry and soft-spoken. "He has a great strategic mind and he plays to win like no one else," says Zaslav. He is a highly focused, driven executive and deal-maker.

Hundreds of billions have been invested in Comcast under Roberts' leadership, organically and through acquisitions. Today, the company has some 29 million customers.

Away from the day job, he's a competition-level squash player; he's won a gold and four silver medals playing for the US squash team at Israel's Macabiah Games and is an inductee of the Philadelphia Jewish Sports Hall of Fame.

Unlike the outsize egos of some media-sector leaders, Roberts is happy to share the credit for Comcast's success with his fellow executives.

This does not mean he doesn't seize every opportunity to keep Comcast a step or two ahead of the competition. In 1997, while visiting Microsoft with a group of other cable operators, Roberts had what he has described as an "ah-ha" moment, when Bill Gates predicted that, one day, data would be bigger than the TV business.

Comcast was already investing a lot of money in fibre-optic infrastructure; in 1997, Gates put \$1bn of his fortune into Comcast, famously gaining a 400% return.

When Roberts became president in 1990, Comcast was generating revenues of \$657m. Via a series of smart acquisitions, organic growth and the exploding demand for internet services, Comcast revenues had blossomed to \$85bn at the end of last year.

It has not all been smooth sailing, of course. In 2004, Roberts launched a surprise, \$54bn hostile takeover of Disney, a move that ultimately failed but which foreshadowed his ambitions to marry content with distribution.

Seven years later, in 2011, Comcast bought a 51% stake in NBCUniversal, adding the remaining 49% in 2013. The deal was a game-changer. But an attempt to buy Time Warner Cable came under scrutiny from US regulators and was canned three years ago.

Overall, Roberts has notched up many more successes than failures. International expansion in the shape of the Sky deal looks like an obvious next move. ■

Giving a voice to the voiceless



Vitae Photography

‘Working on Grenfell was... oh gosh, how do I even articulate that?” asks

Ashley John-Baptiste, the 28-year-old reporter who led the coverage of the tower block fire and its devastating aftermath for BBC Two’s *Victoria Derbyshire* programme last summer. “It was hard to switch off,” he admits.

Originally dispatched to west London to find residents who would speak to *Victoria Derbyshire* live on the programme, he revisited the area multiple times, meeting survivors and building a rapport with the community.

His reports helped earn him a nomination for the Young Talent of the Year

Profile

Pippa Shawley meets Ashley John-Baptiste, who defied his background to become a successful BBC reporter

award at this year’s RTS Television Journalism Awards (the award went to his BBC colleague Nawal al-Maghafi).

“I’m proud of the fact that our programme gave a voice to these people, and we gave them dignity. We allowed

the country to see just what they were going through and how devastating it was and still is,” he says.

That John-Baptiste managed to embed himself in the community was a feat in itself. Many of the residents of Grenfell Tower were reluctant to speak to the media. *Channel 4 News*’s Jon Snow was famously berated by a survivor who shouted: “You should have come here before.... This is not a photo opportunity – this is real life.”

John-Baptiste puts a lot of his success down to empathy, but also admits that his background probably helped people open up to him.

He was placed in care at the age of two and spent the next 16 years moving between foster carers and children’s homes in south London.

[GRENFELL SHOWS WHY] WE NEED NEWSROOMS THAT ARE ECLECTIC AND DIVERSE, AND OF ALL SOCIAL BACKGROUNDS

Despite being suspended from school eight times between the ages of 11 and 15, he won a place to read history at Cambridge. It wasn't until he got to university that he began to engage with news and current affairs. "I'm almost quite ashamed to say that," he confesses.

Even as a Cambridge undergraduate, John-Baptiste never considered getting involved in student media, let alone a career in the industry.

As law firms courted his student peers, taking them to dinner and offering tours of their offices, he thought, "Oh, I'm going to have to go down those conventional career routes."

His journey into the media was anything but conventional. In 2011, his friends dared him, as a lifelong music fan, to audition for *The X Factor*. Days after graduating, he found himself at London's O2 Arena singing in front of celebrity judges Tulisa, Kelly Rowland, Gary Barlow and Louis Walsh. At boot camp, the budding musician was put into boyband The Risk and they got through to the live rounds.

"I remember thinking, 'What on earth is going on? What is my life?'" A lot of my mates were having summer holidays and then they were getting ready for law internships [and] teaching placements, but I was doing live telly."

The talent show was at its height in 2011. Twenty million people had tuned in to watch Matt Cardle beat One Direction the previous year.

John-Baptiste's initial experience was "great" but, three weeks in, the fledgling pop star had an "internal crisis". "I remember thinking, 'We are on the precipice of being famous... of having what many young people want: [a] bit of fame, popularity, performing.... I haven't slogged through Cambridge for three years as a care leaver to throw that away.'"

So he did the unthinkable and quit. It was the toughest decision of his life. He still feels "a bit guilty" about leaving his bandmates.

He went back to the council flat he was given when he left care. It was a stark contrast to the weeks he'd spent living it up in the *X Factor* house and hanging out with the likes of Bruno Mars.

"I felt very isolated," he recalls. "I didn't have a family... so I didn't know what to do."

To make things worse, he found himself being hounded by the tabloid press. "There were a whole load of stories at that time about my faith and my background that were nonsense," he says. "I quit because I just didn't feel like it was the path that would fulfil my intellectual potential."

He picked himself up and went to stay with friends in Cambridge. During this period, he gave an interview to the *Times* to set the record straight.

The piece caught the eye of a producer at BBC Three, who asked if he was interested in making a documentary about people leaving the care system. He was initially reluctant to return to the spotlight, but agreed because he needed the money "and there was an intellectual curiosity".

John-Baptiste spent four months filming *Care Home Kids: Looking for Love*. "I just loved the process," he says. "I loved talking to people. I loved asking questions that you just wouldn't ask in normal life because you don't have the opportunity."

The documentary's commissioner, Fiona Campbell, encouraged him to apply for a Creative Access internship with the BBC News Channel.

He joined the *Victoria Derbyshire* programme at its launch three years ago as an intern. Eventually, he was offered a staff job. It was a perfect fit for the young journalist: "I feel like, on our programme, there's a real ethos when it comes to empowering young reporters, getting stories from underserved parts of the country and unrepresented communities, so that suits me well."

Funny, talkative and humble, John-Baptiste uses his position to inspire other care leavers to strive for success. He also champions more diversity in the country's newsrooms.

There is a "strong will" at the BBC to

enact this change, he believes, but he does occasionally feel like an imposter.

"When you're a minority, it's very easy to fall into that space of 'Am I good enough? Should I really be here?'" he muses.

The solution, he has realised, is to think of the bigger picture: "What drives me is knowing that I represent people in care, I represent disadvantaged people.

"I want to create a new normal for foster children and for care leavers. That really galvanises me to do well and work hard."

His natural charisma means that he is easy to talk to, while his willingness to discuss his own obstacles means that people such as the survivors of Grenfell Tower are more willing to open up to him.

"We need newsrooms that are eclectic and diverse, and of all social backgrounds, because then, when there's a big story [such as Grenfell], you know that you've got someone who represents that community."

More outreach is necessary, he believes. He regularly talks to students from underperforming schools, but says more needs to be done to involve communities that aren't engaged with the media.

Supporting local journalism is vital to this, but he thinks that broadcasters should do more to scout out talented young vloggers and bloggers.

Today, John-Baptiste is still friends with many of the people he grew up with. Their stories help inform his reporting.

Last year, he married Joanna, a teacher from Surrey. "She has a really solid, loving family and that is worlds apart from what I knew as a kid," he says, adding: "That's good for me, especially in the work that I do, going to Grenfell, covering these really emotionally taxing stories."

Does he ever envy Little Mix, the eventual winners of the 2011 *X Factor*, and their four platinum-selling albums? He admits that watching them perform alongside Coldplay, one of his favourite bands, during the *X Factor* finale was tough.

"I was like, 'Oh my gosh, what the hell have I done? Potentially, that could have been us'.... But I'm seeing the fruit of the decisions I've made," he smiles. ■



The Walking Dead

Sky

How eOne broke out

Everyone in TV knows that UK production is thriving in markets across the world. What is less celebrated is the remarkable health of the home-grown distribution sector.

Of late, one company, in particular, has helped drive growth in this area. Entertainment One (eOne) is a studio with a global reach: it sells political drama *Designated Survivor*, *Peppa Pig* and *The Walking Dead*. In the past two years, distribution revenues have more than doubled to £225m.

In 2017, the company was ranked as Britain's second-biggest distributor, beaten only by BBC Worldwide, according to *Broadcast's* annual survey.

Stuart Baxter, previously an executive at Sony and Warner Bros, is President of international distribution at

Distribution

Stuart Baxter tells Steve Clarke how his company has transformed itself into a global production and distribution powerhouse

eOne. Since he joined the company four years ago, he has overseen a dramatic spurt in activity.

During this time, eOne has undergone a transformation, reconfiguring its entire content strategy. In January,

the fêted Hollywood TV and film producer Mark Gordon was appointed eOne's President and chief content officer for film, television and digital.

The move cemented a partnership formed in 2015, when eOne acquired 51% of The Mark Gordon Company. His relationship with eOne had already generated the ABC hit *Designated Survivor* and the movie *Molly's Game*; eOne now owns his company outright.

The secret of eOne's rise to prominence is that it backs high-quality shows, says the softly spoken and charming Baxter: "We have invested a lot more in content, ramping up our production business and development spend."

He claims that he got into TV by accident, after starting out to be a civil engineer. "My maths and my design were fine but I couldn't draw," he recalls.

As eOne has beefed up the quality, the company has set about consolidating its sales and production activities across film, television and digital into a single studio operation.

"That's a huge advantage. There are times when films are in the ascendancy with some players," he says. "In the past, we had one sales person going out selling family content, and another person selling movies, while another was selling TV. That was grossly inefficient."

From London, Baxter overseas a sales force of around 75; he has people working for him in Amsterdam, Beijing, Hong Kong, Los Angeles, London, Madrid, Munich, Sydney and Toronto.

He adds: "eOne started to shift its emphasis from movies to TV eight or nine years ago. It did it at the right time and bought its first two production companies."

When Baxter accepted eOne's offer to work for the company in TV, the firm was best known for producing Canadian supernatural medical series *Saving Hope* (shown by NBC in the US) and police procedural *Rookie Blue* (shown by ABC in the US).

A turning point for eOne came when it signed a deal with US cable channel AMC in 2013 to distribute the latter's scripted shows, including *The Walking Dead*. "We took a big risk doing the AMC deal," he says. "We put an awful lot of money down to fund those shows, more than anybody else was prepared to do. Although the concern wasn't financial, it was all about getting really good quality."

Now that Mark Gordon is on board full time, the sky appears to be the limit for eOne's TV ambitions. Key to the strategy are more US and international partnerships in both TV and film. These include Makeready, a venture with Brad Weston (*The Revenant*), Annapurna Pictures (*Foxcatcher*; *American Hustle*), and Steven Spielberg's Amblin Partners. There's also a new deal with Palomar, with which eOne is developing *Gaddafi*, created by Roberto Saviano, the writer of the successful drama *Gomorrah*.

In TV, it is developing Vicky Jones and Phoebe Waller-Bridge's comedy-thriller *Run*, the duo's first show together since the breakout hit *Fleabag*.

Sharp Objects, which eOne developed and produced, is due to air on HBO this summer. Based on the novel by Gillian Flynn (*Gone Girl*), the series stars Amy Adams and was directed by

TO GET SUCCESSFUL TV SHOWS OFF THE GROUND [NOW, IT IS] ALL ABOUT PACKAGING



Stuart Baxter

Entertainment One

Jean-Marc Vallée (*Big Little Lies*). "We are not disclosing the budget for *Sharp Objects*, but I can tell you its costs are comparable to a feature film. It's an incredible show," says Baxter. "Look, everybody wants the next *Game of Thrones* – something truly original. There was no show like it, but there's an awful lot of poor imitations going on at the moment."

This, of course, raises the question of how an independent such as eOne can hold its course as the boom in high-end drama series drives budgets ever higher.

In this respect, are the streaming services a curse or a blessing? "When Netflix does a deal with a Ryan Murphy [creator of *Nip/Tuck*] or a Shonda [Rhimes], it is building self-reliance. It used to be dependent on distributors. That's reducing.

"I think [the streaming services]

always need some shows to come from the market. But, at the same time, they will also deal with talent themselves. They're pushing up budgets. Only so many people can afford to take bets of that size.

"Actually, we're lucky. We moved early enough and, by making that a seedbed, we're in that game where we, too, can make the big bets."

Baxter, who initially struggled to find buyers for *Breaking Bad* when he ran Sony's London-based sales business, believes stridently in the value of going the extra mile to ensure that every show maximises its potential.

"I read the script for *Big Little Lies* four years ago. When I eventually watched it, I couldn't believe it was the same show. What Jean-Marc Vallée did with that was amazing. It's the difference that packaging makes. When I read the script, they didn't have Nicole Kidman or Reese Witherspoon on board.

"That's what you have to do now to get successful TV shows off the ground. It's all about packaging. To package, you've got to have somebody who's really connected with the networks, with the studios and, frankly, with the agents."

In other words, someone like Mark Gordon. "As soon as Mark came in, he had a look at all the projects at eOne. He goes: 'There's fabulous stuff in here but we need to do this and add this piece of talent,'" recalls Baxter.

The next phase is investing in UK and European producers. Already, eOne has signed a first-look deal with Emily Mortimer's production company, King Bee.

But isn't there a danger that the scripted bubble will burst? "I don't think that too much TV drama is being made but there does need to be still more emphasis on quality," he says.

"There is a danger, with such an influx of money, that some projects that aren't quite complete yet, or haven't been improved as much as they could be, are getting financed that – in harder times – wouldn't be financed."

Will this problem become worse? "I don't think you make too many poor shows and not learn from those lessons. You either make it work and change, or you'll go out of business." ■

Film4 adapts for the age of streaming

Film4

Daniel Battsek explains to **Stuart Kemp** why Channel 4's movie arm needs to focus more on the bottom line

Daniel Battsek landed the Film4 top job in July 2016. His friend David Abraham, then Chief Executive of Channel 4, had brought him in to spearhead the broadcaster's feature-film strategy.

But less than a year after Battsek arrived, Abraham announced that he was leaving. In the ensuing management changes, former Shine Group CEO Alex Mahon was hired to replace Abraham. Battsek, flush with the success of *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, is unfazed by the shake-up.

His career to date, including stints in the UK at Palace Pictures and Buena Vista, and then in New York as President of filmed entertainment at Miramax Films, president of National Geographic Films and president of Cohen Media Group, had prepared him for riding turbulence of this kind.

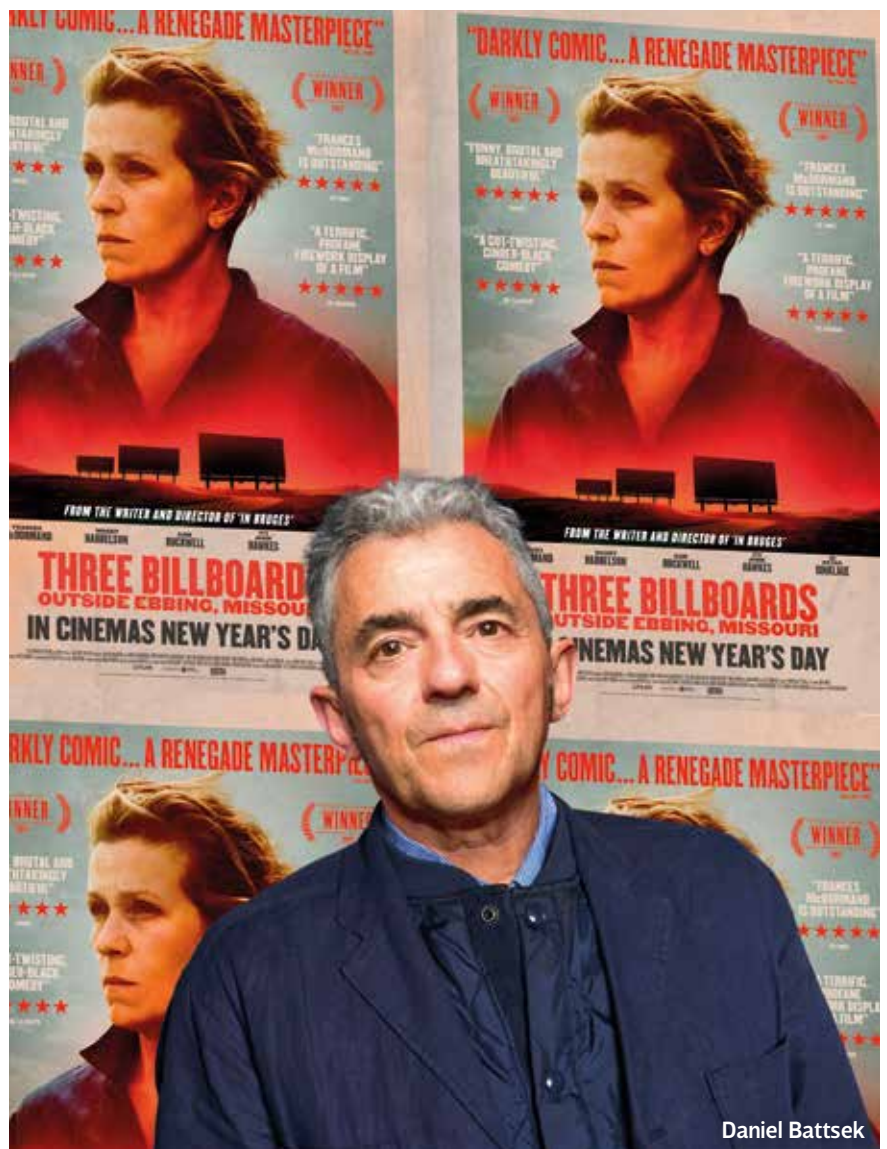
"I've worked for a few different places where there have been big shifts in the personality of the people leading the company," Battsek says. "I was at Disney when Bob Iger replaced Michael Eisner, and I took over at Miramax from the Weinsteins [when Harvey and Bob Weinstein left to set up the Weinstein Company in 2005]. I feel relatively flexible and at ease with those sorts of changes at a company."

The 59-year-old is sipping sparkling water in a meeting room at Film4's Horseferry Road HQ in central London. The walls are adorned with reminders of the division's successes – there's Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave*, Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire*, Lenny Abrahamson's *Room*, Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* and Asif Kapadia's *Amy*.

"I am very excited by Alex's leadership of Channel 4," says Battsek, who is also untroubled by the planned relocation of hundreds of Channel 4 staff outside London.

He doesn't know if Film4 will be expected to move, but industry observers suggest that this is unlikely. Film4's output has always reflected the whole of the UK and it works regularly with film-makers who lack London accents. Think Shane Meadows (*Once Upon a Time in the Midlands*), Boyle (*Shallow Grave*) and Peter Cattaneo (*The Full Monty*).

UK-born Battsek's return to London



Daniel Battsek

with his family in July 2016 followed the surprise departure of Film4's previous CEO, David Kosse. He had been poached to run the international operation of US mini-studio STX Entertainment. Kosse (who replaced Film4's long-serving and highly regarded head, Tessa Ross, in 2014) stayed on to work with Battsek until October 2016 to smooth the transition.

With Abraham's backing, Kosse had embarked on a more aggressive and commercially minded deal-making strategy for Film4. The first project to emerge was Martin McDonagh's *Three Billboards*, starring Frances McDormand, Woody Harrelson, Sam Rockwell and Abbie Cornish.

The film won five Baftas, including Best Film, and went on to win two Academy awards; McDormand won Best Actress and Rockwell scored Best Supporting Actor. It was nominated for a further five, including Best Film. Battsek was backstage at the Dolby Theatre just in case.

When he took over at Film4, the script for *Three Billboards* was commissioned and a 50:50 financing agreement sealed with Fox Searchlight for Graham Broadbent and Pete Czernin's British production outfit, Blueprint Pictures. "Once you partner with the likes of Fox Searchlight, you are giving a film the opportunity to have a US domestic release and a global roll-out. It's a company that has had enormous success over many years in maximising the potential of films such as this," says Battsek.

He admits that, at this stage, no one expected McDonagh's film to become a \$155m (£110m) worldwide box-office smash, although all agreed the script was brilliant.

It is likely that Film4's profit from *Three Billboards* is in excess of £10m, an impressive return, given that its annual budget is around £25m a year.

"There will always be a quality threshold and we will always want to make films with film-makers we developed," says Battsek. "But, although we are not for profit and, like the rest of Channel 4, funded by advertising revenue, we want to make ourselves as self-sufficient as we can."

Film4 is aiming for self-sufficiency by 2020. Battsek says there will be

more significant financial equity investments in certain films: "We are not trying to change the nature of Film4, we're just trying to make sure that, for the films that have the most chance of being profitable, we have the most chance of sharing in that profit."

Channel 4's film arm has struck further similar deals across its development and financing slate. It is

WE WANT
TO MAKE
OURSELVES
AS SELF-
SUFFICIENT
AS WE CAN

collaborating again with Fox Searchlight on Yorgos Lanthimos' *The Favourite*. Set in 18th-century England in the court of Queen Anne, *The Favourite* stars Emma Stone, Rachel Weisz and Olivia Colman, and is tipped to premiere in competition at the Cannes Film Festival in May.

Film4 is partnering with World Wrestling Entertainment for Stephen Merchant's *Fighting With My Family*, starring Dwayne Johnson and Lena Headey. MGM has global distribution rights.

There is a co-finance deal in place with US indie FilmNation for Sebastián Lelio's *Disobedience*, starring Rachel Weisz, Rachel McAdams and Alessandro Nivola, which opens in the UK in May. It is about a woman who returns to her Orthodox Jewish home following the death of her rabbi father, only to stir up controversy in the family.

The arrival of Amazon and Netflix into the world of original content means Film4 is inevitably competing for material and kudos with the deep pockets of the US streaming giants.

"We have to find ways of ensuring that we can maximise our opportunities, sometimes working with them as partners," says Battsek.

He points to Pawel Pawlikowski's Eastern European drama *Cold War*, Lynne Ramsay's New York-set thriller *You Were Never Really Here* and Mike Leigh's *Peterloo*, about 19th-century England. On each of these projects,

Film4 has teamed up with Amazon.

"All those deals are extremely advantageous to the films and to Film4," Battsek explains. "The films that those film-makers wanted to make got made because of Amazon's financial muscle."

Film4 is involved with Netflix on Tinge Krishnan's British musical *Been So Long*, starring Michaela Coel. Netflix has UK rights. "It involves a certain amount of careful negotiation in order to protect our various broadcast rights," adds Battsek.

While Film4 can't compete with the cash Netflix and Amazon are able to offer upfront, Battsek argues that he and his team offer an established and experienced production, development and financing team. This is coupled with a supportive and reassuring place to nurture film-makers and their vision.

Meanwhile, Film4's development slate features an adaptation of Bernard MacLaverty's novel *Midwinter Break*, with John Crowley set to direct, and a film of Peter Carey's Booker Prize-winning novel *True History of the Kelly Gang*, starring Russell Crowe, George MacKay and Nicholas Hoult, with Justin Kurzel directing.

Film4 is partnering with the Ink Factory and Rise Film, to develop the spy drama *The American War*, and is also developing Dean Kuipers' book *Burning Rainbow Farm* as a directing vehicle for Lenny Abrahamson. Anonymous Content and Element Pictures are producing.

The Festival, the first film from Film4's four-picture deal with Fudge Park Films (the company formed by *The Inbetweeners*' creators Damon Beesley and Iain Morris) is about to wrap. The movie marks Morris's debut as a feature-film director. It is this mix of art-house and more commercial projects that defines the Film4 role.

"A great incentive is promoting British film and British film-makers, regardless of [whether] they are first-timers," says Battsek. "We are also determined to make films representing race and gender so that their voices are heard."

"There's a tremendous responsibility, which is part of the Channel 4 remit, to ensure that we focus on this as well, much as we focus on the more commercial end of films we make." ■

The Billen profile

Andrew Billen asks **Jane Featherstone**, one of British TV's most successful drama producers, why she is concerned for the genre's future

Jane Featherstone is not just one of British television's most accomplished drama producers, she is an oxymoron: a mainstream maverick. If you hadn't thought of the *Life on Mars* and *Broadchurch* producer that way, the giveaway should have been the "goddam" she inserted before namechecking that critical untouchable *The Wire*, in her Bafta Television Lecture last October. Her point, I take it, was that niche writing had become too goddam fashionable in television.

"Absolutely," she tells me in the office of her still-new production company, Sister Pictures, where she is battling on despite a skiing injury to one wrist and a consequent hot-pan injury to her other. "But there's nothing like getting a quality, mainstream hit on BBC One or ITV. For me, it's the best thing you can possibly do. Sally Wainwright does it. Chris Chibnall does it. Peter Bowker does it, Kay Mellor does it. There aren't that many, there really aren't."

Mainstream became a swear word? "It became a swear word," she confirms.

Middle-class, middle-brow, middle-ground, mainstream? "That's right: average. And, actually, if you think about some of the classic shows of our time, they've been amazing, quality, mainstream hits."

In her quarter of a century in TV, she has been behind so many of them – *Touching Evil*, *Spooks*, *Law and Order: UK*, *River*. Now, as Chief Executive of Sister, she is likely to make plenty more. Sister's first dramas (unless you count last year's third season of *Broadchurch*, co-made with her old employer, Kudos) are hitting the screen around now, led by Abi Morgan's *The Split* on BBC One. It will be followed by *Cleaning Up* for ITV, *Giri/Haji* (Duty/Shame) for BBC One and Netflix and, next year, *Chernobyl* for HBO.

She has made edgier stuff, too, such



as the dystopian *Utopia*, whose cancellation still hurts, but, generally, she is anti-"cynical" and pro-"relatable". *The Split* is about a family of solicitors in the divorce business. Its subtext is love. Mark Marlow's *Cleaning Up* is about a City office cleaner who becomes a trader. She loves non-genre pieces and, despite their settings, neither is a slick legal drama nor a brutal cop show.

"And I think that's the thing. I don't like cool things," she explains. "I like things that have a heart to them, make you feel something. I think you can do that in a really classy way. Look at *Three Girls* and *The Moorside* and *Little Boy Blue* – incredible pieces of work. Although, interestingly, that popular, mainstream quality seems to have migrated a bit to factual dramas."

FOR ME IT'S ALL ABOUT THE WRITERS, REALLY. I'M IN A POSITION HERE TO MAKE THEM FEEL LIBERATED AND BRAVE

Jane's journey

Jane Featherstone, Chief Executive and founder of Sister Pictures

Born 24 March 1969, Scotland.

Latterly, brought up in Croydon

Parents Father, John Featherstone, chemical engineer; mother, Elizabeth, nurse; one sister, one brother

Lives In Islington; a son and a daughter with a TV documentary-maker

Education Old Palace School, Croydon; Leeds University, BA Hons history and German

1991 PA to footballer Paul Gascoigne

1992 Producer, Hat Trick

1998 Producer, Wall to Wall

2000 Head of drama, Kudos Film and Television

2002 Joint Managing Director, Kudos

2008 Creative director, Kudos

2011 CEO, Kudos

2015, January Resigns from Kudos

2015, November Founds Sister Pictures

Hits *Spooks*, *Life on Mars*, *Humans*, *Broadchurch*

She founded Sister in November 2015. She modestly supposes its quick success in winning commissions is in part down to the high demand for drama right now. Yet, she still worries for the drama industry.

One concern is that international co-production has encouraged generalised, rootless stories. *Game of Thrones* trades on the universality of dramas set in non-existent kingdoms. *The Night Manager* and *McMafia* suggest the future is pan-European flash.

She disagrees, and believes the trend is diminishing: "I think the money is cleverer now. I think that those buyers, wherever they come from, are also now looking for specificity."

In her Bafta lecture, however, she warned that the power of the online giants could lead to less nuanced drama on TV if they stop working with broadcasters such as the BBC, ITV and Channel 4.

"I think they've got 1.4 billion potential subscribers. I mean, that's a global channel like you've never seen before. But they will understand implicitly that *Happy Valley* and *Broadchurch*, which are very specific, incredibly located pieces, are, internationally, the most successful shows Britain has made in many years."

The rise of the Faangs, she clarifies, is good for writers, who will be in demand, but could be dangerous for the old broadcasters if writers are tied into exclusive deals with the disrupters. Writers in Britain, traditionally, work all over the industry because their scripts take so long to green-light, and they need to eat.

But what if, she asks, Netflix were to offer Sally Wainwright an office, a fat salary and a guarantee that her shows would be made and shown all over the world? "Not that Sally would necessarily take the money. But, if I were Netflix, I would be going after that sort of A-list talent."

Her third worry is shared by much of the arts world: that the decline in arts teaching in state secondary schools will result in fewer young Brits being qualified – or even wanting – to enter television.

"We do have to work hard to make sure that the generation of 18-year-olds leaving school believe that this is an industry that they can get a career in – which they can. It's amazing. I love it. We love our jobs. We're so lucky."

There was little in her background to suggest she was going to enter the

creative industries, and still less that her older sister, Vicky (artistic director of the Royal Court) and younger brother, Ric (a composer for television), would do so, too.

She was born 49 years ago in Scotland to a BP chemical engineer and his wife, a nurse. John Featherstone's job took the family to India and Germany before it settled in Croydon, which she refers to as a "dodgy suburb of London". There she attended the fee-paying Old Palace girls' school.

Her father wrote revues at university and played the piano... but, even so, it is a stretch: two top professional storytellers from one family?

"I know. I honestly don't know how that happened," she says. "All I know is that our parents were very good at saying to us, 'Do your best at everything'. They had a really strong work ethic. But also: 'Do whatever you love.'"

After studying history and German at Leeds University, her early career started off at a mighty tangent, as PA to the troubled footballer Paul Gascoigne, a job she heard about from a friend who was working in the press office of Spurs. She was way out of her depth but swam rather than sank. She told her Bafta audience that it taught her to "engage with complicated people".

I wonder why no one has made a drama out of Gazza's dramatic and tragic life. "Maybe, it's just too sad," she suggests. "I think the story hasn't found its redemption yet. We need to see where it ends."

Did she like him? "Yes. He was a sweet, generous, kind man, under an enormous amount of pressure at a very young age, hugely talented."

Gascoigne's manager eventually put her in touch with someone he knew in television and she got a post as a runner, which led to a job at Hat Trick. There, she was line manager on the comedy company's first drama, *Eleven Men Against Eleven*. Appropriately, given her old job, it was set in the Premier League. From there, she went on to spend a short time at World Productions, where she was inspired by the legendary Tony Garnett.

It was her first few years at Kudos, however, when she was head of drama and then Managing Director, that proved her real breakthrough. Specifically, she credits the spy show *Spooks*, on which she was executive producer.

Lorraine Heggessey, the BBC One controller, wanted a serial with a cinematic feel; 9/11 made it almost ▶

➤ dangerously topical. The left-wing playwright Howard Brenton joined the writing team. “It made everyone think a bit more deeply about what we were doing,” she says.

Hustle, *Life on Mars* and *Ashes to Ashes* followed, leading to the key drama of this decade, *Broadchurch*. It became so much a partnership between the writer, Chris Chibnall, and Featherstone that, when series 3 was made, Sister became its co-producer.

Why, though, did she leave Kudos in 2015, so soon after its parent company, Shine, merged with Endemol?

“The real story is the story that’s out there, completely, which is that I’d been there for 16 years and I just wanted a change and a break. It’s honestly that simple.”

It wasn’t that the old firm was getting bigger and bigger? “Really, I had been thinking about going for a while. I was really tired. Honestly, I had been doing it for so long and the company had grown so much and I just thought that it was time for a break and I took six months off. But I loved it and it was heartbreaking, leaving. It was really, really hard. I was so fond of all the people and all the things that we did together.”

She “pottered” around Islington, where she lives with a documentary-maker she asks me not to name. She picked their son and daughter up from school, thought a bit. “I didn’t go travelling, I didn’t do anything particularly expansive. It was so nice.”

That November, she founded Sister with a private investor who must be pretty pleased with the way things are going. She recruited from Kudos its former CEO, Dan Isaacs, and its former head of development, Naomi de Pear.

Although she is proud that *The Split* boasts a female producer, writer and director, Sister employs plenty of men. Why the name, then? “I just wanted it to be a name that sounded different....”

From Mammoth or Renegade or Optimum? “Well, they’re all quite kind of thrusting. I didn’t want it to sound like that. But the timing, again – given what’s been happening in the last year [#metoo] – has been good. I liked the name and I like to be close to my sister as well.”

Could she and Vicky work together on something? “One day, we might do. Who knows? I’d love to work with her one day. We get on very well but she’s quite busy.”

Broadchurch



Which is better: working for a big or small company? “I love both. I really loved working with Shine, truly. I stayed for nine years after my contract. It was wonderful and I loved the collaboration with all these people from around the world. I got to learn so much about international production.

“But working for yourself, the obvious things are: you don’t need to waste time asking anyone’s permission to do anything; you can be very quick and decisive; you can be very nimble. I think you feel liberated.

“For me, it’s all about the writers, really. I’m in a position here to make them feel liberated and brave. That’s really what I try to do here: give them

a place where writers feel they can be brave and we can support them. My favourite part of any day is getting in with a writer and a script.”

Really? Difficult, needy, fragile writers? “Writers are vulnerable like everyone else. And it’s their insecurities and vulnerabilities that they’re brave enough to express for the world. I think it’s a very exposed place, and it’s my job to try and support them as they expose their hearts to the nation. You have to be very brave to do it.”

Maybe that is the point of Jane Featherstone. She understands that, in any turbulent river, the mainstream is, actually, the bravest place to stand. ■

RTS Bursary students

The RTS Bursary scheme was launched in 2014. **Anne Dawson** caught up with six of the first cohort, to see how their working lives are shaping up



Shutterstock

What happened next

Florence Watson

I started at Norwich University of the Arts in 2014, after being out of education for several years. I was battling with mental-health issues and felt unsure about which direction I wanted to steer my life.

Screenwriting had always been a secret passion, so I picked a course that would allow me to bring my characters to life. I applied to the RTS Bursary on a whim. I am so thankful that I did.

The bursary gave me the freedom to focus on my studies and take opportunities that were previously inaccessible to me. All this strengthened the prospects of me finding work following graduation.

I graduated last summer and began applying for as many jobs as possible. Out of 2,000 applicants, I was lucky

enough to gain one of 16 places on the Channel 4 Production Training Scheme. This places you with an affiliated production company for 12 months.

I am now based full-time at Lime Pictures in Liverpool. During the past six months I have worked as both a researcher and an assistant script editor on *Hollyoaks*.

Money is often an uncomfortable subject to talk about, but even small amounts open doors to an industry that feels out of reach for many.

Long term, I want to produce. This was a job that sounded like a fantasy before I was awarded the RTS Bursary. Now I am in a position where I can think about the future and not fear it, which feels amazing.

Florence Watson, 25, researcher / assistant script editor, Lime Pictures.

Suzanne Pearson

Graduating from the University of York in film and television production was a massive accomplishment for me. I was eager to start working, but, after two months of applying for jobs, I was finding it hard to get my foot in the door.

Eventually, I moved back in with my grandparents, in Rotherham, South Yorkshire. Luckily, my grandparents sat me down and had a serious talk. They told me that I was meant for something bigger than Rotherham and urged me to concentrate on getting a job in TV.

It felt like I couldn't do it, but it was the best thing they could have said. I'm so grateful they believed in me.

Support from the RTS helped a lot. It arranged for me to speak to a talent >

› manager, encouraged me to apply to The Network, a talent scheme run by the Edinburgh Television Festival, and invited me to the RTS Cambridge Convention.

It was through these connections that I found out about a job at Raw TV. After my interview – and mid-haircut – I found out that I’d got the job, and I would be starting in two weeks’ time in London.

Graduating was hard, but I’m so grateful that I had people egging me on at every step to make my two big goals a reality: to live in London and to work in television.

I love my job at Raw. As for London, I occasionally miss the Yorkshire greenery and my grandma’s shepherd’s pie but, right now, I’m loving the city life and the buzz that comes with it.

Suzanne Pearson, 21, office runner, Raw TV.

Richard Walker

My TV break came at the end of my second year of university when, after seeing the job posted on The Unit List website, I got two days’ work on *Dickinson’s Real Deal*, which gave me my first TV credit.

I continued applying for TV jobs during my final year at university, working on audition days for *The Voice UK*, *Britain’s Got Talent* and *First Dates*.

After graduating, I made the move to London. I highly recommend the RTS Careers Fair, as I met the RDF Television talent manager there, who gave me my first runner work in London.

Keeping an eye on the Facebook group “People looking for TV work: Runners” and several interviews later, I worked as a logger for *The Undateables* and as a runner for *SAS: Who Dares Wins*.

In August 2017, I was interviewed and offered the position of trainee researcher at Twenty Twenty through the Channel 4 Production Training Scheme.

This is a 12-month contract at a TV production company as either a trainee researcher or trainee production



Florence Watson



Suzanne Pearson



Richard Walker

co-ordinator. It is aimed particularly at ethnic minorities and/or people with disabilities or disadvantaged backgrounds. You receive monthly training at Channel 4 HQ to enhance your 12-month placement.

To get on to the Channel 4 scheme was a three-part process: online application, interview day at Channel 4 HQ and an interview with a production company – in my case, Twenty Twenty.

I worked really hard on my application, rerecording my video several times until it was just right. Demonstrating my ideas was really important for the group task on the interview day.

I prepared for this by having examples of the TV I’d enjoyed recently and what I liked about it.

For the interview at the production company, it was important to research, research and research: knowing and watching the programmes it made and knowing the key people in the company.

It was also important to have in my head examples of when I’d faced deadlines, worked in a team, felt pressure and been creative.

I’ve spent time working in development, on a paid pilot and now a new commission for Sky 1, *Faster: Race the World*. Looking ahead, I finish the Channel 4 scheme in September and will apply for researcher positions in factual television.

Richard Walker, 21, trainee researcher, Twenty Twenty Television.

Hazera Bibi

I studied broadcast journalism at Huddersfield University and realised that I wanted to work in social media. Through the RTS, I was able to land an internship doing social-media work for a documentary company, Rogan Productions.

This helped me get freelance work for the Yorkshire Party candidate in Huddersfield and, a month later, a full-time job at High Street TV.

Everything happened fast. I

graduated and started work the next day. A couple of days later, I moved house.

I had to adapt to the nine-to-five work day quickly. In all honesty, it took me a while. Social media is fast-paced and it's always *on*, and it took months to find the right balance of when I should be "on", and learning how to turn "off" and do something else.

Seven months in and I couldn't be happier. Not only am I doing the thing I love and enjoy, but I've picked up new skills.

One of the things I love about the RTS is the friends I've gained. The first time I came to London for the RTS dinner I was so scared. A few of us decided to meet at King's Cross and travel together. Since then, we have built lovely personal and working relationships.

As cheesy as it sounds, not only have I been able to find a job in something I love, but I've also made friends through the RTS.

Hazera Bibi, 21, social media co-ordinator, High Street TV.

Ophelia Taylor-Brennan

I didn't think that, eight months after graduating from Westminster University with a BA in television production, I'd be writing down my occupation as producer.

After numerous interviews for entry-level roles it wasn't looking good and I was starting to lose all motivation. I decided to take a gamble and apply for an assistant producer role with Cellcast.

On paper, they liked what they saw but were sceptical, given my age and relative lack of experience. I negotiated a trial shift and prepared myself for the night show *Psychic Today*.

Remembering everything I learnt in my live TV module, I confidently assisted in the running of the gallery. Four months and a performance review



later, I now run the gallery as a producer for *Psychic Today*. A massive thank you is due to the RTS for its continued support and helping to turn me into an active practitioner in the field.

I wouldn't be where I am if it wasn't for the RTS Bursary scheme, I'd never have been able to afford studying in London, and Westminster University really set me up for my career.

Ophelia Taylor-Brennan, 22, producer, Cellcast.

Kyle Shiels

I studied broadcast journalism at the University of Leeds and graduated last summer. I am really looking forward to starting work in April as a junior researcher for Knickerbockerglory on *GPs: Behind Closed Doors*, also based in Leeds, my home town.

I learned countless things while I was at university, but some of the most important things I've learnt about my future career have come since.

At the top of that list, I'd place: "Consider what's right for you."

When you're a graduate, with a nice big pile of student-loan debt and a lot of free time to spend job-hunting, the first job offer to come your way might look really attractive.

Of course, it may be perfect for you. But, if not, consider your options, talk to loved ones and don't feel shy about looking elsewhere.

Your mental health and well-being are just as important as your first job, and the right one will come along with the right effort and determination.

Through mentors, masterclasses, events and everything in between, the RTS Bursary probably ranks as the best thing that could have happened to my prospective career.

Even after graduation, the RTS team are interested and caring about your progress. No matter how old and grey I get, I'll always consider myself an RTS Bursary student.

Kyle Shiels, 22, junior researcher, Knickerbockerglory. ■

OUR FRIEND IN THE MIDLANDS

When it was first mooted that Channel 4 might move

outside London, some London-based producers were quoted as saying: “But we’ll all spend our lives on the train – to places like Birmingham.” It was as if Channel 4 was thinking of moving to the Moon.

The facts of life are that, at present, life on a train is what a huge number of producers, writers and other TV professionals have to endure if they don’t want to, or can’t, live in London, but still want to work in the industry.

I’m writing this sitting on a train from Birmingham to Bristol. In 21st-century England, intercity train journeys not via London generally take longer, and occur on less salubrious rolling stock, than journeys to and from the UK’s capital. So, once the usual altercation about seat reservations has been resolved, it’s a good place to ponder “Whither England?”

This prescient paragraph feels very relevant today: “Centrifugal forces are apparent in society as a whole. It is not only Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland that look for a separate identity. In England, too, there seems to be a growing resistance to the apparently inexorable magnetism of London.” Not a line from a recent Ofcom report, but the introduction to a 1969 BBC paper “Broadcasting in the Seventies”, which laid out the plan for the organisation’s local radio and regional television services.

This is not to say that nothing has happened since 1969. It’s the nature of our business to feel like the regions

Birmingham accents were once the butt of jokes. Not any more, says Joe Godwin, as he praises regional creative diversity



BBC

are on a long piece of elastic. This is rather like some hilarious game-show challenge. Occasionally, a contestant stretches and pulls and makes it over the line but, all too often, as victory feels within reach, the elastic twangs them back to the start.

But it definitely feels right now like the regions are pulling hard, sure-footed on the slippery path to success.

At the beginning of April, the BBC brought England’s regions into the Nations & Regions division; and the Director-General talked about a renewed commitment to serving people outside of London at the launch of the annual plan.

Meanwhile, Channel 4 has declared its out-of-London plans, while Ofcom is keenly watching mighty English oaks from little acorns grow....

Why does this matter? It’s not a case of benevolence; I believe that it’s crucial to creative diversity, innovation and fair representation, and fundamental to the future of our public service broadcasters.

Production and content from places beyond London can be a real winner across the whole UK: Channel 4’s *Derry Girls*, *Keeping Faith* from BBC Wales and *Shetland* on BBC Scotland. These commissions also provide jobs, skills, and cultural impact and pride.

Regional portrayal and representation is as important as regional investment and production.

Having a world-class cast take on the roles of Birmingham gangsters, the Peaky Blinders, stomping around Small Heath and Sutton Coldfield is an incomparable experience for local audiences. And not just in the Midlands, it works across the UK.

Whereas, once upon a time, the Midlands accent was often the butt of jokes on TV, now – thanks to *Peaky Blinders*’ Tommy Shelby – having a Birmingham accent is cool.

The BBC is planning for the Nations & Regions division to be at the heart of what we do. More than half of the BBC’s workforce is now based outside London. And, in England, with all local and regional services joining colleagues in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, there’s a real opportunity to bring more scale and innovation to the job of telling the stories and hearing the voices of England. ■

Joe Godwin is director of the BBC Academy and of BBC Birmingham.



RTS Programme Awards 2018

Hosted by **Vernon Kay**, the awards were presented on 20 March at the Grosvenor House Hotel, London, in partnership with Audio Network

Judges' Award: Charlie Brooker and Annabel Jones for *Black Mirror*

The winners and nominees of all 29 awards are listed over the next seven pages >

Netflix



Actor (Female)

Sinéad Keenan – *Little Boy Blue*

ITV Studios for ITV

‘Compelling and heart breaking. She brought the whole story alive.’

Nominees:

Wunmi Mosaku – *Damilola, Our Loved Boy*, Minnow Films for BBC One

Thandie Newton – *Line of Duty*, World Productions for BBC One

Actor (Male)

Stephen Graham – *Little Boy Blue*

ITV Studios for ITV

‘Unquestionably brilliant, showing extraordinary range and skill.’

Nominees:

Sean Bean – *Broken*, LA Productions for BBC One

Jack Rowan – *Born To Kill*, World Productions for Channel 4

Arts

Paula Rego: *Secrets and Stories*

Kismet Films for BBC Two

‘An exceptional piece of film-making, brilliantly evoking the dramatic sweep of the artist’s life.’

Nominees:

Basquiat – *Rage To Riches*, A BBC Studios Production for BBC and PBS with Thirteen Productions for BBC Two

Grayson Perry: *Divided Britain*, Swan Films for Channel 4

Breakthrough Award

Daniel Lawrence Taylor –

Timewasters

Big Talk Productions for ITV2

‘Creating a world that didn’t exist before – original, clever and insightful. Clearly, we’ll see much more of this talent in the future.’

Nominees:

Daisy May Cooper and Charlie Cooper – *This Country*, BBC Studios Comedy for BBC Three

Molly Windsor – *Three Girls*, BBC Studios in association with Studio Lambert for BBC One

Children’s Programme

Inside My Head: A Newsround Special

CBBC Productions for CBBC

‘Supremely well researched, an important piece of television.’

Nominees:

Jamie Johnson/End Game, Short Form Film Company for CBBC

Apple Tree House/Talking Books, Five Apples for CBeebies

Comedy Performance

Daisy May Cooper and Charlie Cooper – *This Country*

BBC Studios Comedy for BBC Three

‘Charming, endearing and warm... giving this funny show genuine heart.’

Nominees:

Tom Davis – *Murder in Successville*, Tiger Aspect in association with Shiny Button Productions for BBC Three

Michaela Coel – *Chewing Gum*, Retort for E4

Daytime Programme

Moving On – Eighteen

LA Productions for BBC One

‘Massively watchable, diverse and inclusive.’

Nominees:

The Question Jury, Monkey Kingdom for Channel 4

Good Morning Britain, ITV Studios for ITV

Documentary Series

Hospital

Label1 for BBC Two

‘Wide ranging, challenging programmes, with difficult subjects handled confidently, and a series able to prompt national discussion.’

Nominees:

The Detectives: Murder on the Streets, Minnow Films in association with the OU for BBC Two

Catching a Killer, True Vision for Channel 4

Triple award winner
This Country





Richard Kendal/BBC/ITV

1 Actor (Female):
Sinéad Keenan – *Little Boy Blue*

4 Sports Presenter, Commentator or Pundit: Michael Johnson – *World Athletics Championships*

7 Children's Programme:
Inside My Head: A Newsround Special

2 Arts:
Paula Rego: *Secrets and Stories*

5 Actor (Male):
Stephen Graham – *Little Boy Blue*

8 Comedy Performance, Writer – Comedy and Scripted Comedy:
Daisy May Cooper and Charlie Cooper – *This Country*

3 Breakthrough Award:
Daniel Lawrence Taylor – *Timewasters*

6 Single Documentary:
Rio Ferdinand: Being Mum and Dad

9 Daytime Programme:
Moving On – Eighteen

Lifetime Achievement

Jimmy McGovern

'He's written for the theatre and film and could doubtless have enjoyed a stellar career in either, but instead chose to focus his attention on television as the best place to tell his stories.

'And that's what he says he is – not a writer, but a storyteller. A storyteller from a proud, northern, working-class tradition, who approaches his craft like a working tradesman, painstakingly building his narratives and characters as a bricklayer might construct a wall.

'And what stories. Firmly rooted in everyday life as it's really lived, his stories are a delicate balance between the simplicity of his narratives and the complexity of his characters. They're stories about the messiness of real life; stories about people who struggle – maybe with addiction, adultery, violence, guilt, corruption, debt, revenge, anger or shame.

'It's the completeness and depth of his characters that makes his work so exceptional – the many layers of a man such as Fitz in *Cracker*, so



Richard Kendal

brilliantly brought to life by Robbie Coltrane, or the conflicts within Father Michael Kerrigan, played with real nuance by Sean Bean in *Broken*.

'Jimmy began his writing career in the early 1980s on Channel 4's ground-breaking Merseyside soap, *Brookside*, where he showed how truthfully he could write about working-class life in a city [stricken by deindustrialisation].

'His breakout work, *Cracker*, followed a decade later, and was a massive hit. But it was being asked

by the Hillsborough families in 1996 to write about what happened in the hell of that Sheffield football stadium that would have the greatest impact, both on Jimmy and what was to follow. *Hillsborough* challenged the officially reported version of events, telling the story of the families' ongoing agony in the face of a brutal campaign of police lies, political cover-up and legal obstruction.

'Perhaps the most important work Jimmy would ever write, it was an early but hugely significant milestone on the families' journey to seek justice for the 96 fans unlawfully killed that Saturday afternoon. Two decades on from his television film, the truth of what Jimmy wrote was finally – officially – acknowledged.

'His work has also given an authentic voice to people whose stories are rarely told with conviction or realism on television – whether they're the striking workers on the Liverpool wharf-side in *Dockers* in 1999, or the indigenous Australian households of an inner-city suburb of Sydney in *Redfern Now* in 2012.

'He writes about big themes – responsibility, accountability, communities that feel trapped – and about people who are overlooked, or lied to, or wilfully ignored. And there is never any doubt whose side he is on.'

Drama Series

The End of the F*ing World**

Clerkenwell Films and Dominic Buchanan Productions for Channel 4
'Beautifully written and directed, with performances that were through the roof... taking huge creative risks.'

Nominees:

Ackley Bridge, The Forge for Channel 4
The Crown, Left Bank Pictures for Netflix

Entertainment

Love Island

ITV Studios/Motion Content Group for ITV2
'This series... has evolved into a uniquely contemporary watch – it makes its own rules and is compelling and spellbinding viewing.'

Nominees:

Ant and Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway, ITV Studios and Mitre Television for ITV
Murder in Successville, Tiger Aspect in association with Shiny Button Productions for BBC Three

Entertainment Performance

Adam Hills, Alex Brooker and Josh Widdicombe – The Last Leg

Open Mike Productions for Channel 4
'The genuine warmth, imagination and sense of fun just shines through.'

Nominees:

Anthony McPartlin and Declan Donnelly – I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!, ITV Studios for ITV
Claudia Winkleman – Strictly Come Dancing, BBC Studios for BBC One

Formatted Popular Factual

Muslims like Us

Love Productions for BBC Two
'Innovative, nuanced, and exceptional in its breadth of casting.'

Nominees:

Rich House, Poor House, Hat Trick Productions for Channel 5
The Big Life Fix with Simon Reeve, Studio Lambert for BBC Two

History

Elizabeth I's Secret Agents

72 Films for BBC Two
'A visually rich piece that told new stories in an arresting style.'

Nominees:

My Family, Partition and Me: India 1947, Wall to Wall Media for BBC One
Black & British: A Forgotten History, BBC Studios for BBC Two

Live Event

World War One Remembered: Passchendaele – For The Fallen

BBC Studios for BBC Two
'A remarkable event beautifully executed, telling the story as well as lots of others in an innovative and accessible way.'

Nominees:

One Love Manchester, BBC Studios/SB Projects for BBC One
ITV News Election Night: The Results, ITN/ITV News for ITV



1 Documentary Series:
Hospital

4 Entertainment Performance:
Adam Hills, Alex Brooker
and Josh Widdicombe –
The Last Leg

7 History:
*Elizabeth I's
Secret Agents*

2 Drama Series:
*The End of the F***ing World*

5 Presenter:
Anita Rani – *My Family, Partition and
Me: India 1947*

8 Live Event:
*World War One Remembered:
Passchendaele – For the Fallen*

3 Entertainment:
Love Island

6 Formatted Popular Factual:
Muslims like Us

9 Mini-Series and Writer – Drama:
Three Girls

Host: Vernon Kay



All pictures: Richard Kendal

Paul Hampartsoumian

Mini-Series

Three Girls

BBC Studios in association with Studio Lambert for BBC One

'Incredible, raw performances in a sensitively handled and ultimately devastating story.'

Nominees:

The State, Archery Pictures and Stonehenge Films for Channel 4

Born To Kill, World Productions for Channel 4

Presenter

Anita Rani – My Family, Partition and Me: India 1947

Wall to Wall Media for BBC One

'This broadcaster told a personal story with an approach that was both authoritative and deeply emotional.'

Nominees:

Grayson Perry – Grayson Perry: Divided Britain, Swan Films for Channel 4

Gordon Ramsay – Gordon Ramsay on Cocaine, Studio Ramsay/Objective Media Group for ITV

RTS Channel of the Year

BBC One

'Commissions wide-ranging, challenging programmes that still push at the boundaries, and with an astonishing mix of quality.'

Nominees:

CBBC

Channel 5

Science and Natural History

Planet Earth II

BBC Studios' Natural History Unit, with BBC America, ZDF, Tencent and France Télévision for BBC One

'Two words sum it up... simply phenomenal.'

Nominees:

Guy Martin vs The Robot Car, North One Television for Channel 4

Dogs: An Amazing Animal Family, Offspring Films for Sky One

Scripted Comedy

This Country

BBC Studios Comedy for BBC Three

'Authentic, clever and with characters and a setting that felt completely fresh.'

Nominees:

People Just Do Nothing, Roughcut TV for BBC Three

Chewing Gum, Retort for E4

Single Documentary

Rio Ferdinand: Being Mum and Dad

Only the Best Productions for BBC One

'A profoundly brave personal journey, told with incredible emotional honesty.'

Nominees:

Chris Packham: Asperger's and Me, Raw for BBC Two

The Accused, Brinkworth Films for Channel 5

Single Drama

Murdered for Being Different

BBC Studios for BBC Three

'Bold and powerful. A gut-wrenching watch.'

Nominees:

Damilola, Our Loved Boy, Minnow Films for BBC One

King Charles III, Drama Republic for BBC Two

Soap and Continuing Drama

Coronation Street

ITV Studios for ITV

'Some astonishing performances, but always grounded, confident and utterly believable.'

Nominees:

EastEnders, BBC Studios for BBC One

Holby City, BBC Studios for BBC One

Sports Presenter, Commentator or Pundit

Michael Johnson – World Athletics Championships

BBC Sport for BBC One and BBC Two

'Someone who brings the viewer a uniquely authoritative perspective combined with excellent insight.'

Nominees:

Osi Umenyiora – NFL This Week, The

NFL Show, Whisper Films for BBC Two

Kelly Cates – Friday Night Football, Sky Sports

Sports Programme

Anthony Joshua vs

Wladimir Klitschko

Sky Sports for Sky Sports Box Office

'A perfectly executed piece of stand-out coverage.... It was stunning.'

Nominees:

2017 FA Cup Final Coverage, BBC Sport for BBC One

UEFA Women's Euro – England vs Netherlands Semi-Final, Whisper Films for Channel 4

Writer – Comedy

Daisy May Cooper and Charlie

Cooper – This Country

BBC Studios Comedy for BBC Three

'Was both warm and poignant in a world rarely represented... a brilliantly funny piece.'

Nominees:

Steve Stamp and Allan

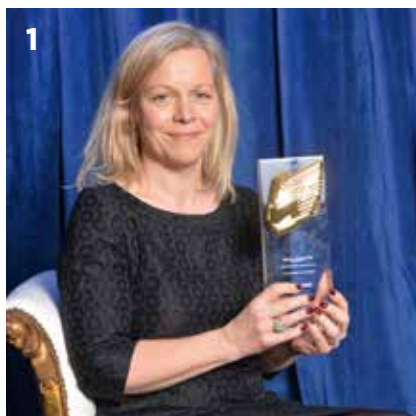
Mustafa – People Just Do

Nothing, Roughcut TV for BBC Three

Michaela Coel – Chewing Gum, Retort for E4



RTS Award of Special Recognition: *The Crown* Netflix



1 RTS Channel of the Year:
BBC One (accepted by BBC director of
content Charlotte Moore)

4 Single Drama:
Murdered for Being Different

7 RTS Award of Special Recognition:
The Crown

2 Science and Natural History:
Planet Earth II

5 Soap and Continuing Drama:
Coronation Street

8 Writer – Drama:
Three Girls

3 Single Documentary:
Rio Ferdinand: Being Mum and Dad

6 Sports Programme:
Anthony Joshua vs Wladimir Klitschko

9 Judges' Award:
Charlie Brooker and Annabel Jones for
Black Mirror

Pictures: Richard Kendal/BBC

Writer – Drama

Nicole Taylor –

Three Girls

BBC Studios in association with Studio Lambert for BBC One

‘It would be hard to overstate the intellectual dexterity, cultural sensitivity and raw emotional force... the writer is an exceptionally rare talent.’

Nominees:

Charlie Covell – The End of the

F*ing World**, Clerkenwell Films and Dominic Buchanan Productions for Channel 4

Jeff Pope – Little Boy Blue, ITV Studios for ITV

RTS Award of Special Recognition

The Crown

‘We have presented an RTS Award of Special Recognition to a production for an outstanding contribution to the reputation of British television around the world.

British programmes have been seen overseas for decades – since Lew Grade first got on a plane in the 1960s, in fact – and British shows have always been admired abroad for their sheer quality.

‘The list of British big international hits is long and distinguished – *Downton Abbey*, *Planet Earth*, *Inspector Morse*, *Top Gear*, *Monty Python...* even *The Benny Hill Show*, back in the day.

‘This has a vast, global audience in 190 countries – and has shown the world British production expertise at its absolute finest.

‘It has also brought huge international investment into British drama, changing the landscape for high-end production. With its very British story, British creative and technical talent behind the camera, and an almost exclusively British cast, the series has put feature-film production values on to the small screen for the world to see, and done so with a style and on a scale unlike any other.

‘Its epic sweep across the second half of the 20th century is much more than

a historical account of our Queen’s reign – it’s the story of Britain in a time of rapid social change, when the age of deference gave way to the liberal consensus of the 1960s, and the country fumbled to define its post-imperial role.

‘It’s the story we’ve lived through, and are living through still. It is told by some of our finest writers, our most talented producers and directors, and our very best actors.

‘It is a series of ambition, grandeur and – dare we say it – majesty.’

Judges’ Award

Charlie Brooker and Annabel Jones for Black Mirror

‘The recipients are the creative executive producers of a show that has touched the zeitgeist and connected, particularly, with millennial audiences in the most profound way. *Black Mirror* is a series that defies neat categorisation. Science fiction? Apocalyptic satire? Psychological thriller? The truth is that it’s all of the these.

‘Even describing it as this generation’s *Twilight Zone* doesn’t do justice to the creative sweep of *Black Mirror*. Using modern society’s delight in evolving technology and our addiction to the new media as its jumping-off points, the show takes the viewer to a different world in each episode, with its own parallel reality.

‘Its anthology format gives *Black Mirror* the creative space to be whatever it wants to be with each new scenario – sometimes it is shocking, dark and nightmarish, sometimes it is witty, touching or thrilling. It is, though, always audacious.

‘To have the idea is one thing, to turn the idea into a piece of quality television is quite another. That is why the judges have recognised the work of these two creative showrunners.

‘Together, they have brought to the screen a series that has both thrilled critics and struck a real chord with younger audiences, who have engaged with the show with an almost evangelical fervour.’ ■



Drama Series:
*The End of the F***ing World*

Channel 4/Paul Hampartsoumian

RTS Futures

Kate Holman
hears how the
Netflix series
brings Britain's
royal history
to life

From script to screen



The Crown

Netflix

Taking a script and bringing it to life on screen is no easy feat – and when the story is based on the most famous family in the world, the task carries huge responsibility. “We’re not just recreating history,” said *The Crown*’s production designer Martin Childs. “It’s our own version of the world – it’s not a documentary. We try and find the mood and tone of our version of it,” added costume designer Jane Petrie.

“When I first get a script, I just read it as a viewer. The first thing is genuine excitement... then the fear starts setting in,” revealed director Ben Caron.

Editor Pia Di Ciaula admitted that she reads the scripts the way many viewers devour Netflix’s hit royal drama: “I set aside a weekend and I binge-read them all.”

The TV experts were talking at the RTS Futures event, “*The Crown*: from storyboard to screen”, in March.

Caron revealed that the crew watched hours of archive footage during series development to bring authenticity to the story. “Peter Morgan [writer of *The Crown*] will sit down with the researchers at the beginning of each series and give an outline of

what events he plans to cover. He’ll then send the researchers away to build up a mass of relevant material.”

The highly documented life of the Royal Family provides endless material for the drama and a base for the story to unfold. “Archival footage gives you a starting point to work from to create your version of it,” said VFX supervisor Ben Turner. “There are some things I try to recreate perfectly and others where I use artistic licence.”

However, Caron made it clear that the production team is not making factual TV: “We are not trying to make a documentary, but I am trying to find the truth in a scene. I’m never daunted by the weight of historical truth.”

As the second series of *The Crown*, which was released last December, swings into the 1960s, subtle changes in set design and costume were key

to showing the transition into a new decade. “Part of the fun is returning to locations and updating them,” said Turner. “With London Airport, we could start introducing terminal buildings and more vehicles and bring it into the Heathrow era.”

With 398 sets to create for series two, the production team had a huge design project on their hands, but this also gave it a strong creative influence on *The Crown*’s look. “Peter’s scripts are not too descriptive about the scenes; he gives few words and I have liberty on how to interpret [them],” said Martin Childs.

Ben Turner’s visual effects contribute hugely to this illusion. Filming the royal yacht, *Britannia*, required months of work, connecting and interweaving six places to create just one location.

“We flew a drone around the *Britannia* in Edinburgh and took photographs on deck,” he explained. “We took a lot of different photos of the same thing but from different angles to create our own computer-generated version.” ■

The RTS Futures event was chaired by Toby Earle and produced by Tom Popey, with support from Allie Elwell.

**I'M NEVER
DAUNTED BY
THE WEIGHT
OF HISTORICAL
TRUTH**

Scotland
Centre

In March, Glasgow's CitizenM hotel hosted an evening devoted to BBC One's *Homes Under the Hammer*, which has notched up more than 1,200 episodes since its 2003 debut.

University of the West of Scotland lecturer and producer/director Paul Tucker (*Edwyn Collins: Home Again*) welcomed series editor Mat Marsters and executive producer Lisa Hazlehurst to a celebration of the property show's 15th birthday.

Hazlehurst described *Homes Under the Hammer* as a "juggernaut". The show – a beast that "never stops moving" – is on air for 80 hours a year. But, thanks to a well-oiled production process, an episode takes only about 14 days to complete, from shooting to post-production.

In 2008, Lion Television shifted the main body of production from London to Glasgow. In 2013, the whole team followed. Hazlehurst described the move as "like



BBC

15 years under the hammer

refuelling in mid-air", as it took place while the show was still filming.

Marsters explained the show's approach to training, which, he said, has "helped

the wider industry as a whole". It offers traineeships that pair beginners with experienced crew, and trains them in various production areas over 18 months. Many

of the newly skilled then carve out their own paths in the industry, often returning to the show as experienced technicians.

Alice Aries

Emma Tennant 1968–2018

Emma Tennant, who has died aged 49, after suffering from cancer, was one of the pioneers of multichannel TV in the UK.

At ITV, she turned ITV3 into the UK's second most-popular channel and, more recently, as UKTV controller, she spearheaded the launch of Drama, and entertainment channel W. On her watch, UKTV significantly increased its investment in original commissions and expanded into scripted comedy, including Gold's first original sitcom, *You, Me & Them*.

Emma's other commissions included the acclaimed

Taskmaster, *Dave Gorman: Modern Life is Goodish*, *Alan Davies: As Yet Untitled* and *Red Dwarf XI*.

She was widely regarded as a warm, down-to-earth and hard-working executive who enjoyed the company of journalists. Those who knew her will miss her wicked smile, and sense of fun and mischief.

Emma read English and film studies at the University of East Anglia. Her first job in TV was working as a receptionist for United Artists Programming. A year later, she became an acquisitions assistant for Discovery Europe.

Emma joined Living TV as a scheduler in 1994. In 1997,

she was promoted to head of programming.

At Living, she first demonstrated her ability to identify and buy standout US shows. *Will & Grace*, *CSI* and *Next Top Model* were among her acquisitions.

Unusually, her next move involved leaving TV for two years to run music and puppet classes for small children.

But, in 2005, she accepted a job as controller of ITV3, which had launched the previous year. At ITV, where she also ran CITV, Emma helped to establish ITV3 as a destination for reruns of drama and movies on a modest budget of £19m.

"I didn't expect ITV3 to do as well as it has done," she confessed in 2008.

Clever scheduling, broadening the channel's appeal to include US fare and repeats of BBC drama, plus some original commissions, all helped to boost ITV3's popularity. At CITV, her commissions included *Bookaboo*, winner of a Children's Bafta, Broadcast award and Prix Jeunesse.

In 2011, Emma was poached by UKTV, where she quickly made an impression.

UKTV CEO Darren Childs said: "Anyone who met Emma knew her to be one of the kindest, warmest and most nurturing people working in television."

Emma is survived by her husband and two daughters.

Steve Clarke

Matthew Bell hears how good PR can boost a show's audience

The product needs to be great – if you've got a terrible TV show, you can have the best PR campaign in the world and no one will be there for the second episode."

Public relations expert James Herring was talking at an RTS London event in March that looked at stunts, unit PR and social media campaigns. Chaired by Trevor Morris, ex-CEO of Chime PR Group, "Building a buzz 2: what makes a good PR campaign?" followed – one year on – another London event, "Building a buzz: what makes a good promo?"

Herring, managing partner of Taylor Herring, argued that "the traditional television 30-second advertising spot is becoming less and less relevant", claiming that 84% of viewers fast-forward through TV ads. The reach of online and social-media advertising has also been affected, he added, revealing that 20% of global smartphone users have installed ad-blockers.

To overcome ad resistance, Taylor Herring – which specialises in PR stunts – has developed "new [PR] rules of engagement" for campaigns, which Herring summed up as "entertain or die".

Barriers need to be broken down, he said: "You have to stop thinking about channels or Facebook and Twitter campaigns. Come up with a brilliant idea and work out the best way of making it work. "A YouTube clip can become a talking point on a prime-time TV show. A tweet can prompt an entire newspaper debate,



The PR campaign for *Fortitude*

Sky

Building a publicity buzz

which will be talked about on drive-time radio shows."

Herring discussed some of the stunts that his agency has pulled off. For Sky Atlantic's *Game of Thrones*, these included installing a huge dragon skull on a Dorset beach and capturing the reactions of passers-by, and dressing up pug dogs as characters from the fantasy series.

To launch the same channel's Arctic crime drama, *Fortitude*, it unleashed a semi-animatronic polar bear on London. The stunt garnered coverage in eight national newspapers and drew 30 million Twitter impressions in the UK.

Alice Bruce, head of television at Premier, managed the unit PR for BBC One's *Death in Paradise*, a joint UK-French production filmed on the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe. She explained how the agency promoted the

launch of the seventh series earlier this year.

"Lots of people watch *Death in Paradise*; however, we can't take it for granted that these people are going to come back every year. So, we need to refresh our campaigns," she explained. This

year, Ardal O'Hanlon replaced Kris Marshall in the lead

role of the

drama. "We needed to get people to invest in Ardal's character. The show is built around the central character who solves odd murders every week – it's similar to *Midsomer Murders*," she added.

Death in Paradise, which starts its annual run in January, is promoted as the "perfect holiday hangover". As well as interviews with the cast and guests stars – this year, the latter included Simon Callow and *Car Share*'s Sian Gibson – the unit publicity for the show worked with the island's tourist

board to promote travel features about Guadeloupe, which, of course, also plug the TV show.

"The main thing is to maintain viewing figures throughout the entire, eight-episode run – if we don't get good viewing figures, we don't get the next series," said Bruce.

Goodstuff planning partner Paul Gayfer discussed the social-media campaign that used Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to publicise the return of relationship comedy-drama *Cold Feet* to ITV in September 2016.

"Nostalgia and reunions" were the key themes of a campaign that sought to appeal to the show's fans and find new viewers for a series that first ran from 1997 to 2003 and stars, among others, James Nesbitt, Fay Ripley and John Thomson.

"We built a strategy that played out around the emotions of getting the gang back together," said Gayfer. "The perfect fit was Facebook: it's the home of reunions, pulling together millions of [people] every year." ■

NEW RULES OF ENGAGEMENT: ENTERTAIN OR DIE

Queen's and Ulster clean up in Belfast

Northern Ireland Ulster University and Queen's University Belfast divided the spoils at the RTS Northern Ireland Student Television Awards.

Ulster University students scooped the Animation

award for *Hunger* and the Comedy and Entertainment prize for *Take It From Me*.

Queen's University students won the Drama award for *Beast*, and both the Factual and new Craft Skills – Camera prizes for *Nomad*, which was

made by Zoe Tweedy and Joshua McGonigle.

"These awards help the RTS to raise awareness of the amazing home-grown talent emerging from our third-level colleges," said RTS Northern Ireland Chair Kieran Doherty. "This year's entries all displayed very high standards of creativity, innovation and technical capability, and I know the judges had a difficult task selecting our winners.

"I trust these awards will

assist all the students in their future careers."

The winners were announced at an awards ceremony in March held at the Black Box, Belfast, and hosted by UTV presenter Judith Hill. Emma-Rosa Dias, MD of Afro-Mic Productions, gave the Joe McKinney memorial speech.

The awards were supported by the Department for Communities as part of its Creativity Month.

Matthew Bell

RTS Northern Ireland student winners

Animation - *Hunger* - Matt McDyre, Scott Gill, Daniel Boyle, Hannah Loughridge and Hannah Turkington, Ulster University, Belfast

Comedy and Entertainment - *Take It From Me* - Meghan McArdle,

Nathan Stevenson, Ewan Beckett and Orla Finucane, Ulster University, Magee

Drama - *Beast* - Alex Harper, Ryan Early, Holly Croman, Sean Dorris and Skaiste Gotseldaité, Queen's University Belfast

Factual and Craft Skills – Camera - *Nomad* - Zoe Tweedy and Joshua McGonigle, Queen's University Belfast

Honours shared in Sheffield



Award winners Abbie Scargill and Jack Goodchild

Yorkshire Centre The top prizes were shared around the region's universities at the RTS Yorkshire Student Awards, which drew a crowd of 220 to Sheffield United FC in late March.

Charlotte Thomas from the Northern Film School at Leeds Beckett University took the Animation award with *Goodbye*, which the judges said was an "exceptionally accomplished piece for a single animator", employing "a cohesive story with a clever twist and carefully observed character animation".

Cleveland College of Art and Design students Janice Lee, Jamie Jones, Sarah Maher and Beth Taylor were awarded the Comedy and Entertainment prize for the "inventive" and "hugely professional" *Cirque*.

The Drama award went to Hope Kemp, Guillem Zamora, Sarah Westby and Grace Johnstone (University of York) for *The Neighbourhood*, which "gave the judges a good scare".

University of Leeds

students Ishan Siddiqui, Hugh Clegg, Carlotta Grimaldi and Charlotte Field won the Factual award for *Taraash*, a "beautifully shot" film with "a great narrative and engaging central character".

Megan Levers (University of Sheffield) lifted the News award with a film about attempted suicide, *Craig's Story*. "A well-crafted piece that shows the journalist has great maturity and strong story sense," said the judges.

The Short Feature award went to York St John University's Liam Taylor-Rutterford, Abbie Scargill, Matthew Liddle, Jack Goodchild, Rachel Meredith, Jack Lochrie and Matthew McDermott for the "thought-provoking, challenging and poignant" *The Same Deep Water As You*.

BBC Radio Leeds' Johnny l'Anson hosted the ceremony, stepping in for *ITV News Calendar's* Christine Talbot who had been due to host the awards in February, which were postponed because of bad weather.

Matthew Bell

RTS Yorkshire student winners

Animation - *Goodbye* - Charlotte Thomas, The Northern Film School at Leeds Beckett University

Comedy and Entertainment - *Cirque* - Janice Lee, Jamie Jones, Sarah Maher and Beth Taylor, Cleveland College of Art and Design

Drama - *The Neighbourhood* - Hope Kemp, Guillem Zamora, Sarah Westby and Grace Johnstone, University of York

Factual - *Taraash* - Ishan Siddiqui, Hugh Clegg, Carlotta Grimaldi and Charlotte Field, University of Leeds

News - *Craig's Story* - Megan Levers, University of Sheffield

Short Feature - *The Same Deep Water*

As You - *Abnormal Exit Productions* (Liam Taylor-Rutterford, Abbie Scargill, Matthew Liddle, Jack Goodchild, Rachel Meredith, Jack Lochrie and Matthew McDermott), York St John University

Craft Skills – Animation - *Camera-Ember* - Curtis Hartley, Sheffield Hallam University

Craft Skills – Comedy and Entertainment - *Camera-Encased* - Victoria Greensmith, Sheffield Hallam University

Craft Skills – Factual - *Camera-Taraash* - Hugh Clegg, University of Leeds

Craft Skills – News - *Camera-Life off the Ball: Mental Health in Rugby League* - Kyle Shiels, University of Leeds

Craft Skills – Short Feature - *Camera-Made of Glass* - Jack Goodchild, York St John University

Experts share TV tips

North West Centre

RTS North West welcomed an audience of 200 to its Student Media Conference at the Lowry Theatre, where producers from the leading indie Monkey Kingdom discussed making the ITVBe reality series *The Real Housewives of Cheshire*.

Executive producer Mike Swindells, who has worked on the show since its debut in January 2015, attributed its success to the 40-plus production team that works on the show, including “two robust camera teams with the latest equipment”.

He added that they have “almost total access” to cover “the peaks and troughs of the women’s relationships”, thanks to their strong rapport with cast members.

Swindells said that Monkey Kingdom looks for people “with real ambition” with “ideas to contribute” to work at the indie. His advice was “learn every day”. Series producer Dan McGowan added: “Be flexible and prepared to work long hours.” Sarah Jane Whitehead, who makes “friends with Cheshire” to facilitate shoots on the reality show, advised: “Nurture relationships on and off camera.”

In a session on newsgathering in a crisis, two broadcast journalists revealed how they responded to the Manchester Arena bombing in May 2017. Head of *ITV News Granada* Lucy West said it had been an unremarkable news day until, “at 10:34pm, a journalist living opposite the Arena rang her, saying, ‘I’ve just heard a bang.’”

She went to the police to confirm the information, talked to her teams, then went straight into the office, calling in camera crews and reporters. West “started to get film back from the scene at just past 11:00pm”.

Producer Teresa McMahon posted film and images coming from the Arena on the news website. “It quickly became apparent that something out of the ordinary was happening,” West said. A plan was needed: “Where do we need to be? Who do we need to talk to? By 3:00am, and for the next two weeks, we had a full newsroom.”

West’s priority was “to tell the stories in a way that did justice to the people who died, and those whose lives were changed for ever”, and to “keep the eyes of the UK and the world on Manchester”.

She advised the students in the audience: “Immerse yourself in the news agenda – look for stories.” McMahon added: “Do anything to get that vital experience to draw on when something big happens.”

The conference also offered a session on TV researching and networking opportunities.

Carole Solazzo

Redacted image

The Manchester Arena bombing

Salford showcase for student film-makers

Following the conference, North West revealed the winners of its Student Awards at a ceremony hosted by *Granada Reports* Lucy Meacock.

University of Salford students picked up two awards: Martina Moscariello’s *Life in Europe* won the News category and Harry Whitehead’s *Wanderlust* the Short Feature.

Edge Hill University, Liverpool John Moores University, University of Bolton and University of Central Lancashire students racked up

one victory each in the other four categories. The awards showcase the talent and creativity in our universities

and colleges,’ said Richard Frediani, Chair of the North West Student Awards.

‘The North West is the second largest cluster of creative industries

in Europe, and TV production is a big part of that, so it’s great to see such high standards being reached by the next generation of programme-makers,’ added RTS North West Chair Cat Lewis.



Martina Moscariello

Claire Harrison

RTS North West student winners

Animation - *Peregrine the Pathetic* - Peter Miller, Edge Hill University

Comedy and Entertainment - *The Trick in Trick or Treat* - Michael Haffenden, Ethan Woodroffe and Bradley Heath, Liverpool John Moores University

Drama - *Lost In Loss* - Gaius Brown,

Jake River Parker, Heather Davenport and Jodie Home, University of Central Lancashire

Factual - *Fallen Angels* - Kathryn Berry, University of Bolton

News - *Life in Europe* - Martina Moscariello, University of Salford

Short Feature - *Wanderlust* - Harry Whitehead, University of Salford

RTS events IN BRIEF

Midlands scores with first quiz

A bumper crowd of 140 attended the first Midlands 'Big telly quiz' night – hosted by Slade singer and local legend Noddy Holder – in Birmingham. BBC team 'The Radio Brainwaves' claimed top spot, beating quizzers from Central News, members of the Doctors cast and The Producers' Forum, as well as indies such as North One and Full Fat Television. Midlands Chair Caren Davies said: 'The quiz gave us the opportunity to bring the Midlands broadcasting industry together.'

Ireland finds its dancing feet

Republic of Ireland (Rol) members received a behind-the-scenes tour of RTÉ One hit *Dancing with the Stars*, which is filmed at Ardmore Studios Film Factory, County Wicklow. 'Our colleagues, most of whom have worked on big, light entertainment productions, were most impressed with the amazing hi-tech studio set-up and facilities,' said Rol Chair Charles Byrne. 'As one of our members said, "It must be like producing the Eurovision Song Contest transmission every week."

CBBC team wins North West quiz

CBBC held off a team from post-production facility Dock 10 to take first place at RTS North West's 'Great big telly quiz'. The quiz – which again featured the hugely popular accordionist George playing mystery TV tunes, as well as catchphrase and picture rounds – drew 15 teams from the region's TV industry to the Lowry Theatre.

Ember excels in the East

Ember Films chalked up two wins at the RTS East Awards, which were held at Norwich University of the Arts in March. The Norfolk indie took the Promotional Film award for *RNLI and Finisterre* and the Digital Content prize for *Norwich Castle Keep*.

The awards ceremony was hosted by ITV News Anglia presenter Becky Jago and Stewart White, host of BBC regional news show *Look East*.

ITV Anglia enjoyed a successful evening, winning three awards: Sean Cockrell took the Production Craft Skills award; Chloe Keedy won the New Talent On-screen prize; while Sarah Byrd was named Best On-screen Personality.

The BBC also tasted success at the ceremony. *Look East* won two awards: journalist Nabihah Parkar took the New Talent Off-screen award and news and sports presenter James Burridge lifted the Diversity award. BBC East won two awards: the News and Current Affairs Feature award for its reporting of the Lauri Love computer hacking case and the On-screen Journalist award for Jo Taylor.

Three Norwich producers won awards: Tin Can Island triumphed in the Factual Programme category with *In*



Double-award winner: Ember Films

Amanda Sandland-Taylor

Search of Arcadia; Eye Film and Television took the Post-Production Craft Skills prize for *Unseen*; and Forward Wex Photo Video's *The Blind Photographer: More Than an Image* won the Short Film award.

"The awards are a fantastic showcase for the brilliant creative media industries in East Anglia. The entries were all of a very high standard, creative and original, fascinating and illuminating," said RTS East Chair Nikki O'Donnell.

Anglia Ruskin University took three of the five main Student Awards, Drama, Factual and Short Feature.

Norwich University of the Arts lifted the Animation prize and Cambridge University triumphed in Comedy and Entertainment.

Norwich University of the Arts also won three of the four Craft categories (Camera, Production Design and Sound), with the University of Bedfordshire taking home the Editing award.

"Encouraging new talent is at the heart of everything we do, so I was delighted with the very high standard of our student winners and nominees," said O'Donnell.

Matthew Bell

RTS East winners

Factual Programme - *In Search of Arcadia* - Tin Can Island for BBC Four

News and Current Affairs Feature - *Lauri Love case* - BBC East

On-screen Personality - Sarah Byrd, ITV News Anglia - ITV Anglia

On-screen Journalist - Jo Taylor, Look East - BBC East

New Talent On-screen - Chloe Keedy, ITV News Anglia - ITV Anglia

New Talent Off-screen - Nabihah Parkar, Look East - BBC East

Short Film - *The Blind Photographer: More Than an Image* - Forward Wex Photo Video

Promotional Film - *RNLI and Finisterre* - Ember Films

Production Craft Skills - Sean Cockrell, ITV News Anglia - ITV Anglia

Post-production Craft Skills - *Unseen* - Eye Film and Television

Diversity - James Burridge, Look East - BBC East

Digital Content - *Norwich Castle Keep* - Ember Films

Student Animation - *Comfort Zone* - Elliot Stronza, Leana Mae Felipe and James Wetz, Norwich University of the Arts

Student Comedy and Entertainment - *Wenlock & Jones* - Cassia Price, Cambridge University

Student Drama - *Hello Friend* - Theo Douchand, Alina Bobilova, Alessandro Piccato, Mehdi Iromlou and Matthew

Burdfield, Anglia Ruskin University

Student Factual - *Rebirth* - Theo Douchand, William Stephens and Edward Armstrong, Anglia Ruskin University

Student Short Feature - *I* - Mihaela Motica, Anglia Ruskin University

Student Craft Skills - Camera - *Elagabalus Lives* - Matthew Nodwell, Norwich University of the Arts

Student Craft Skills - Editing - *CoMBAT W4RR10R* - Daniel Read and Ben Parsons, University of Bedfordshire

Student Craft Skills - Production Design - *Amnesiac* - Alex Hermon, Norwich University of the Arts

Student Craft Skills - Sound - *Tunnel Vision* - Chris Fitzmaurice, Norwich University of the Arts

BBC One drama *Three Girls* won five awards at the RTS West of England Awards at the Bristol Old Vic in March, on a night when the BBC took many other prizes as well.

Three Girls – based on the Rochdale child sexual abuse scandal – was named best Drama. Director Philippa Lowthorpe, cinematographer Matt Gray, editor Una Ni Dhonghaile and composer Natalie Holt were also honoured at the ceremony, which was hosted by *Him & Her* star Kerry Howard.

BBC Studios Unscripted Productions took seven awards: *Extreme Wives with Kate Humble* (Documentary); *Nadiya's British Food Adventure* (Factual Entertainment); and *Without Limits: Vietnam* (Factual). *Countryfile's* Steve Brown won the New On-screen Talent prize.

Gritty doc *Drugsland* picked up three awards for the BBC outfit: Sacha Mirzoeff, best (non-scripted) director; Hugo Pettitt, "Flying Futures" Talent Award; and Colette Hodges, Angela Maddick, Rupert Troskie and Darren Flaxstone, non-scripted editing.

The BBC's Natural History Unit won three awards for *Blue Planet II* and also saw its CBBC series, *The Zoo*, named best Children's programme. Keo West trumped the BBC in the Natural History category with *Rise of the Warrior Apes*, which tells the story of a troop of chimpanzees in Uganda over 23 years.

In the News categories, *BBC Points West's* Fiona Lamdin was named best News Reporter for "her persistence and skill in instilling confidence in her contributors". *Inside Out West* won the News Coverage award for its "powerful, original journalism".

"The quality of work in Bristol goes from strength to strength," said Lynn Barlow, Chair of RTS Bristol.

Presenter and



BBC

Triple-award winner: *Drugsland*

BBC dominates at Bristol awards

sign-language interpreter Sherrie Eugene-Hart received the Ambrose Fleming Memorial Award for her outstanding contribution to TV. She began her career more than 25 years ago presenting the HTV West weather, before moving across the studio to host the

evening news show and going on to present *The Good Neighbour Show*.

"Sherrie was one of the first people to use sign language on British TV and a tireless campaigner for inclusion in the city," added Barlow. **Matthew Bell**

RTS West of England winners

Ambrose Fleming Memorial Award• Sherrie Eugene-Hart

Film• *Access All Areas*• Camden Film Company

Drama• *Three Girls*• BBC Studios/Studio Lambert for BBC One

Natural History• *Rise of the Warrior Apes*• Keo West for Discovery Channel

Factual• *Without Limits: Vietnam*• BBC Studios for BBC One

Documentary• *Extreme Wives with Kate Humble*• BBC Studios for BBC Two

Factual Ent• *Nadiya's British Food Adventure*• BBC Studios for BBC Two

Children's• *The Zoo*• BBC Natural History Unit for CBBC

Animation• *My Genome* sequence for Great Ormond Street Hospital• Wonky

Short• *Check the Label*• Calling the Shots

Reporter• Fiona Lamdin, *BBC Points West*• BBC West for BBC One

News Coverage• *Inside Out West*• BBC West for BBC One

New On-screen Talent• Steve Brown, *Countryfile*• BBC Studios for BBC One

On-screen Talent• Steve le Fevre, *Crunch the Week*• Made in Bristol TV

Flying Futures Talent Award• Hugo Pettitt, *Drugsland*• BBC Studios for BBC Three

Craft (Drama): Cinematography• Matt Gray, *Three Girls*

Director• Philippa Lowthorpe, *Three Girls*

Editing• Una Ni Dhonghaile, *Three Girls*

Sound• Owen Shirley, Andrew Wilson, Scott Hazell and Dave Mackie, *Breakdown*• Dave Mackie Films

Craft (Non-scripted): Cinematography• *Blue Planet II* camera team• BBC

Natural History Unit, *The Open University*, BBC Worldwide, Tencent, BBC America, France Télévisions and CCTV9 for BBC One

Composer• Natalie Holt, *Three Girls*

Design, Programme content and VFX• *The Secrets of Your Food*• BDH Creative for BBC Two

Director• Sacha Mirzoeff, *Drugsland*

Editing• Colette Hodges, Angela Maddick, Rupert Troskie and Darren Flaxstone, *Drugsland*

Grading• Adam Inglis, *Blue Planet II*

Sound• Graham Wild, Kate Hopkins and Tim Owens, *Blue Planet II*• Wounded Buffalo

Digital Creativity• *Wonderful You*

VR• BDH Immersive

ONLINE at the RTS

■ Last month's Programme Awards brought the RTS national awards season to a close. The digital team was hard at work speaking to the winners and nominees, from comedy to drama, via sport and documentary. Watch all the backstage interviews at www.rts.org.uk/backstagePA18.

■ *Chewing Gum* creator and *Black Mirror* star Michaela Coel sat down with us to reflect on the two years since she won the inaugural Breakthrough Award in 2016. As well as looking back on her incredible rise to international success, she offers tips and advice for young comedians and writers looking to make their mark on the television industry (www.rts.org.uk/MichaelaCoel).

■ This year's big winners at the Programme Awards were Daisy May and Charlie Cooper, who scooped four nominations and went home with awards for writing, performance and scripted comedy for their show, *This Country*. Charlie speaks about the programme's origins, the difficulties of working with family and why 'chav-baiting' is not what the BBC Three mockumentary is about (www.rts.org.uk/ThisCountry).

■ Actor Jack Rowan received his first RTS Programme Award nomination for his starring role in Channel 4's *Born to Kill*, putting him up against acting heavyweights Stephen Graham (who was named Best Actor) and Sean Bean. Jack talks about his acting inspirations and how his background as an amateur boxer came in handy while filming BBC Two gangster drama *Peaky Blinders* (www.rts.org.uk/JackRowan). **Ed Gove**

OFF MESSAGE

Let's hear it loud for Vernon Kay, the erstwhile Radio 1 DJ, who became a go-to presenter for top-notch entertainment shows. Vernon was the host of last month's RTS Programme Awards. Despite having just flown back from Uruguay, he presented the evening's 29 awards with great verve – and in record-breaking time.

His section of the evening ended on the dot at 11:00pm, giving plenty of time, for those who wished, to catch the last tube home. Or, better still, hit the dance floor.

■ The night's big winner was, of course, BBC Three's painfully brilliant *This Country*. The show deservedly won in three categories – Scripted Comedy, Comedy Performance and Writer – Comedy.

The mockumentary is favourite viewing in the Off Message household. It is a genuine example of an original show that mines humour (and pathos) from ordinary experience. No one could call the show an overnight sensation: series 1 was a full seven years in gestation.

Incidentally, the show's success represents another triumph for comedy guru Shane Allen.

One of the evening's other winners was the matchless *Black Mirror* – commissioned by Allen at Channel 4, before he left for the BBC.

■ Talking of hit comedy, it's good to see the man who green-lit *Little Britain* and *Gavin & Stacey* returning

to the world of entertainment. Stuart Murphy, formerly of BBC Three and Sky, where he oversaw the pay-TV firm's original shows, is joining English National Opera as its new CEO.

Let's all hope that Stuart will be as successful at ENO as Tony Hall was at the Royal Opera House – and that he hasn't abandoned his plans to write comedy.

■ Why do the online giants keep stealing TV's top women?

Last year, Amazon Studios hired FremantleMedia International executive Georgia Brown to spearhead its European commissioning strategy. This was followed by Channel 4's Jay Hunt joining Apple.

Now, FremantleMedia's hugely impressive CEO, Cécile Frot-Coutaz, has also been recruited by a Faang-owned company. Cécile is bound for YouTube, as head of EMEA. There, she will be working with Robert Kyncl, the firm's chief business officer, to help grow the business across Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

After more than two decades (including periods as executive producer of *American Idol*, *America's Got Talent* and *The X Factor USA*), Cécile will be seriously missed at the production and distribution giant.

So, could YouTube end up working with Simon Cowell?

■ Off Message was charmed to hear of a caller to the RTS asking how they could obtain free trees as part of The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy initiative, highlighted in ITV's *The Queen's Green Planet*.

The green-fingered caller had read the story on the RTS website and couldn't wait to get planting. ITV has joined forces with the Woodland Trust and Sainsbury's to give away 10,000 packs of trees to viewers of *Good Morning Britain* and *This Morning*.

Although the saplings will not be available until the autumn – the best time for planting – you need to apply for your silver birches, rowans and hazels now. First come, first served.

■ The peerless PBS documentary *The Vietnam War*, recently nominated for a Bafta, was one of the hidden gems of BBC Four's autumn schedule. The channel repeated the 10-part series over Christmas, as critics named the programme one of the top shows of 2017.

Now PBS is premiering the full, 18-hour director's cut of *The Vietnam War* in the UK on PBS America.

Set your PVRs now.

■ And, finally, farewell to the man who was the BBC's very first media correspondent, Nick Higham.

He retired last month following an epic, 30-year stint with the broadcaster, spent mainly at Television Centre.

Nick long ago branched out beyond media to cover general news and arts stories. In an era of fake news, his crisp authority will be missed by BBC audiences. He was seen off at a boisterous evening in Fitzrovia. Nick plans to spend more time doing the things he loves, such as long-distance walking and researching those history books he's always wanted to write.

Off Message wishes him well.



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