

December 2023/  
January 2024

# Television

A man with dark, curly hair and a serious expression stands in a dimly lit library. He is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt with puffed sleeves, a brown patterned vest, and a green neckerchief. His right hand is held out palm up, and his left hand is in his pocket. The background shows wooden bookshelves filled with books.

**Giving  
up the  
Ghosts**



7 February 2024  
10am-4pm

# RTS FUTURES CAREERS FAIR 2024

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## From the CEO



As the RTS year ends there is much to celebrate. At the beginning of December, the RTS Craft & Design Awards 2023 recognised the remarkable talent and craftsmanship that underpins the UK's thriving and globally acknowledged television sector.

Congratulations to all the winners and nominees. Huge thanks to the evening's host, Eddie Kadi, recently seen hoofing it on *Strictly*, who presented the awards with real comic panache. Thanks also to Ade Rawcliffe, who chaired the awards, and to our sponsor, Apple TV+. Details of all the winners are inside.

It's been a spectacular year for BBC Studios Events, which won two Craft & Design awards for its coverage of the State Funeral of HM Queen Elizabeth II.

Its painstaking work was highlighted at a fascinating RTS National Event, held in late November. *Television* carries a full report of "A masterclass in major events broadcasts and production with Claire Popplewell and team".

In Cardiff, RTS Cymru Wales, in association with Bad Wolf and BBC Cymru Wales, held a premiere of *Doctor Who – The Star Beast*, to celebrate the Time Lord's 60th anniversary.

Our cover story is Shilpa Ganatra's interview with Mathew Baynton, one of the stars of *Ghosts*, the hilarious sitcom that takes its final bow this

Christmas following five series.

We also examine what challenges the new CEO of CNN, Mark Thompson, faces as he begins to reinvent the news giant for the digital age.

Also, don't miss Susanna White's TV Diary. She is the lead director and an executive producer on Apple TV+'s acclaimed new period drama *The Buccaneers*.

Finally, I'd like to wish all our readers a very happy New Year.

Theresa Wise

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# TV diary

I'm writing and I love it. It started in lockdown. I was missing production, and someone suggested I write something to create a world I could control. I only wish I'd discovered it sooner. But maybe it's only now that I feel there's a lot of things that I want to say.

I'm working on a screenplay that is essentially my own coming-of-age story. One of the best moments in my career was when the BFI said it would fund development of the script. Now I must deliver it.

■ Last week, I was invited to talk about my career at the Kerry Film School alongside my long-term collaborator, the cinematographer Mike Eley. Mike and I started out together in documentaries.

We find ourselves describing to the students what it was like shooting the first documentary we made together for television, *Rocket Men*, on 16mm film. The film followed amateur rocket enthusiasts around the world who collectively dreamt of launching a rocket into space.

■ The students found it hard to imagine what it was like not to see rushes till they came back from the lab – and a time where your only limitations were the number of rolls of film you were allocated. We remember having time to wait for the best light and carefully figuring out the composition of each shot before you turned over and started shooting a scene.



Nick Pourgourides

## Film and TV director Susanna White looks back to pre-digital TV and forward to a new career as a writer

It was a moment when making television allowed for reflection, not unlike the writing I'm doing now, a process where self-reliance and an individual voice was what counted.

Lack of connectivity had its challenges, though. I remember having to call Channel 4 from a phone box at Woomera in Australia to ask for extra filming days because a rocket could not be launched because of bad weather, and the coins dropping through at alarming speed on the long-distance call.

■ My life seems to flash before me. They pull up clips from *Bleak House*, *Nanny McPhee* and *the Big Bang*, *Generation Kill* and *Parade's End*. Then, the last film I made with Mike, *Woman Walks Ahead*. Written by Steven

Knight and starring Jessica Chastain, Michael Greyeyes, Sam Rockwell, Ciarán Hinds and Bill Camp, the students try to understand why it didn't get a theatrical release. I ask myself the same question.

■ This week, connectivity is everything. I do interviews via Zoom with journalists from South Korea, Brazil, India and Spain about the new show I have made for Apple TV+, *The Buccaneers*.

The actors' strike has meant that our cast can't do promotion, so they have been relying on myself, the showrunner, Katherine Jakeways, and our executive producer Beth Willis to do the interviews.

The first three episodes drop at once on 8 November, followed by weekly instalments. It's a long way from the pre-streamer world of *Bleak House*, which I made for the BBC when Andrew Davies came up with the idea of half-hour episodes and a weekly omnibus.

The principles of storytelling remain the same. People always want cliff-hangers. Charles Dickens figured that out long before us and the Greeks long before him. No matter how much television fashions change, it is always the characters and story that pull people in.

Susanna White is the lead director and executive producer of Apple TV+'s adaptation of Edith Wharton's unfinished, posthumously published novel *The Buccaneers*. She is represented by Casarotto Ramsay.

# COMFORT CLASSIC



## Yes Minister

BBC

**Matthew Bell** hails the show that single-handedly transformed the public view of the corridors of power

**B**y a delicious irony, *Yes Minister* is being rerun on BBC Four at the same time as the Covid inquiry grills the country's leading civil servants and politicians.

No one, though, could confuse the fictional Sir Humphrey Appleby with Party Marty or the deputy cabinet secretary who brought a karaoke machine to one of the illegal lockdown parties at 10 Downing Street.

Sir Humphrey, played by Nigel Hawthorne in full scenery-chewing mode, is the wily, supercilious Permanent Secretary to new Minister of Administrative Affairs Jim Hacker (Paul Eddington, fresh from his breakthrough role in another classic sitcom, *The Good Life*).

The premise of *Yes Minister*, which ran on BBC Two for three series from 1980 to 1984, was simple: idealistic but bungling minister tries to reform government and is invariably frustrated by the dark arts of the civil service.

Explaining his role, Sir Humphrey says: "My job is to carry out government policy." Hacker replies: "Even if you think it's wrong?"

"Well almost all government policy is wrong," responds Sir Humphrey, pausing to smirk for comic effect, "but frightfully well carried out."

Episodes largely conclude with

Hacker, bamboozled by a verbose Sir Humphrey monologue, acceding to the wishes of the Machiavellian civil servant, who responds with a knowing, "Yes, Minister".

Learning from Sir Humphrey, Hacker becomes cannier and more cynical as the series progresses and chalks up a few victories.

The political satire was created by writer/director Jonathan Lynn, a natural Labour supporter, and Antony Jay, whose varied career included a stint with BBC current affairs and speechwriting for Conservative politicians.

Lynn and Jay made Hacker a political centrist; indeed, neither Conservative nor Labour parties are mentioned in *Yes Minister*. It was probably just as well. The BBC, arguably as faint hearted sometimes with politicians then as now, delayed the first episode

# Ear candy

until after the 1979 general election for fear of offending either party.

Famously, *Yes Minister* was the favourite show of Margaret Thatcher, a woman with no discernible sense of humour. The PM performed a sketch – apparently written largely by her press officer, Bernard Ingham – with Eddington and Hawthorne, which set the bar for cringeworthy TV very high indeed.

The two actors, both politically of the left, were horrified at having to appear with Thatcher in a sketch that TV writer Graham McCann has described as “only comical in its awkwardness”.

*Yes Minister* won five Baftas over just three series, three for best comedy series and a couple for Hawthorne’s performance. After a two-year pause, the series returned as the equally successful *Yes, Prime Minister*.

Twenty-five years later, with Eddington and Hawthorne both dead, *Yes, Prime Minister* was revived by UKTV channel Gold with David Haig as Hacker and Henry Goodman as Sir Humphrey.

And still it refuses to go away. Lynn’s latest iteration, a play he wrote solo after Jay’s death – *I’m Sorry Prime Minister, I Can’t Quite Remember* – premiered this October.

In an interview with the *Daily Telegraph* discussing the play, Lynn looked back at the original TV series: “People and politicians now distrust the civil service in a way they didn’t used to. In the old days, people imagined it was men with bowler hats sitting around drinking cups of tea. Our series revealed that they are the people who mostly run the country.”

*Yes Minister* is gentler than the show it inspired, Armando Iannucci’s gloriously potty-mouthed *The Thick of It* – “The angry, rampaging bastard child of *Yes Minister*,” as broadcaster Andrew Marr described it.

Yet, more than 40 years after its debut, *Yes Minister* hasn’t dated, thanks to its pin-sharp writing and impeccable performances. And Iannucci, not a bad judge of comedy, lauds it as Britain’s best sitcom. ■

**Yes Minister is on BritBox (all three series), Amazon Prime (series 1) and BBC iPlayer (series 2 and 3).**



Geoff Lloyd, Sara Barron

## They Like to Watch

One of the best things about *Succession* was Geoff Lloyd and Sara Barron’s watch-along podcast, *Firecrotch & Normcore*.

The two formed a double act to rival Tom and Greg, as hilarious in their marital banter as they were rigorous in their analysis, and far less toxic than the self-proclaimed Disgusting Brothers – but maybe just as bawdy.

It says a lot that HBO had its own official podcast for the show but that, come the final season, Lloyd and Barron were seemingly landing interviews with whomever they fancied.

Although I’m surprised that Jesse Armstrong braved an appearance after all of Barron’s creepy love letters to the unsuspecting showrunner.

After mourning the loss of a drama that warranted such a deep dive, they returned with a new podcast that’s more of a sift through the tsunami of series we find ourselves in.

True to form, *They Like to Watch* is another great name, and one just as salacious. If anything, Lloyd and Barron’s eclectic taste will give you some unique recommendations. I’m all for their advocacy of sleeper hits such as the idiosyncratic obs-doc *How To with John Wilson* and the hipster’s hitman, *Mr Inbetween*.

However, their unfavourable views

of *The Bear* are downright criminal.

They also admirably incorporate documentaries – a genre that doesn’t always receive the cultural clout it deserves, bar the odd sensationalised true-crime-of-the-day. Check out their passionate discussion of *Once Upon a Time in Northern Ireland*.

I haven’t even mentioned the interviews yet, which are often both enlightening and a hoot. Sarah Phelps was fascinating on the painstaking process of writing her sensitive true-crime hit *The Sixth Commandment*; Greg Davies and Alex Horne were on riotous form in a recent episode on *Taskmaster*.

Often, their listeners and interviewees recommend series that the couple then watch in the following weeks – it was Phelps who introduced them to *Mr Inbetween*.

They devote the last 10 minutes of each episode to fan mail, sent to their still brilliant email address that doubles as a legacy of the late Logan Roy: fuck-off@firecrotchandnormcore.com.

It touches like these that lend the podcast a kind of intimate book club feel, albeit one that stays much more on topic (it’s my experience that book clubs tend to be little more than an excuse for a day-drink and a chinwag).

To butcher a catchphrase of Barron’s that, thankfully, has not caught on, *They Like to Watch* is one hundy P listeny listeny (100%). ■

**Harrison Bennett**

# WORKING LIVES

## Drama commissioner

Lauren Lyle in *Karen Pirie*

ITV

**Huw Kennair-Jones** commissions new drama at ITV, as well as keeping a close eye on two of the nation's biggest soaps, *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale*. Recently, he's been hard at work on upcoming dramas *Until I Kill You* and *After the Flood*.

### What does the job involve?

Working with the brilliant producers and writers we have in this country, we look for dramas that we think people will watch and love on ITV – and then we facilitate the producers to make them. We're out there telling people what we think might work for ITV, and the producers also come to us with great ideas.

We want ideas that will surprise and challenge us, so we're not simply doing the same thing over and over again.

### What was your route into TV?

I was not a very good theatre actor and terminally out of work. A friend of mine was in the Sky football soap *Dream Team* and he used to stay with

me because they filmed in south-east London near where I lived. One day, they needed someone to photocopy the scripts, so I did that. I became a script assistant, then a script editor and then joined the BBC; eventually, I became a producer on shows such as *Holby City* and *EastEnders*.

### Are you a frustrated actor?

Absolutely not! I knew from early on that I wasn't the best actor in the world, although I had a good run. It was a useful experience, though, because I read a lot of plays and, by a kind of osmosis, I learnt about structure and dialogue. That has proved really useful.

### How did you get into commissioning?

I covered the maternity leave of a commissioner at Sky in the days when it wasn't making much drama. Sky started to increase its drama output and I ended up staying there for six and a half years – it was a great experience. The first commission I was involved with was *Thorne*, a crime

series starring David Morrissey, based on Mark Billingham's books.

### Do you have to produce before you can commission?

Having a knowledge of production helped me – you can see certain situations coming down the line – but I don't know if it's vital; not every commissioner has been down the producing route.

### Before joining ITV in 2017, you were editor of BBC Radio 4's *The Archers*. Has that helped you as a commissioner?

Making a lot of 15-minute episodes in a tight turnaround focused my mind. I had to be very sure of the story that we wanted to tell right from the start, which was a very valuable lesson. I love soaps and still work on *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale*.

### Who do you work with closely?

My most important relationships are with producers and writers – without them, we can't do anything. It really is



all about the scripts. I work closely with the producers and writers to develop ideas and a script, and then take it to Polly Hill, the Head of Drama, and, if she likes it, we take it to Kevin Lygo, ITV's Managing Director, Media and Entertainment. He says yes or no; if it's yes, we make it.

### Is this a long process?

It usually takes 18 months to two years from development and commissioning to transmission – the scripts need to be written, then cast and filmed, then the episodes have to go through the edit process.

### What have you commissioned at ITV recently?

I've been working on *Until I Kill You* from World Productions, the true story of Delia Balmer and how she survived living with a serial killer, and *After the Flood* from Quay Street, a thriller set in a community in the aftermath of a flood.

Last year, with *Karen Pirie*, an adaptation of a Val McDermid book, we took a traditional format – a two-hour crime show – but we had such a brilliant writer, Emer Kenny, and star, the Scottish Bafta award-winning Lauren Lyle, and Simon Heath and the amazing team at World Productions, that we were able to offer a fresh take on the genre.

### What makes a good commissioner?

Obviously, a commissioner has to represent the interests of what will work best for the channel. Also, you have to let all the people involved in a drama do their jobs: the producers to produce, the writers to write and the directors to direct – as a commissioner, it's your job to support them as much as possible so they can do their best work.

You have to respect the time and effort people have put in in the first place, even if it's an idea that doesn't end up being right for us. You are dealing with the creative process, which is a very personal thing. We are nothing without writers and producers, and we are so lucky in this country to have such brilliant ones.

### Is it tough turning down good ideas?

Sometimes you have to turn down great stuff. We get loads of good ideas and sometimes we have to say no because they may sit in the same place as another show or they might not fit into the current ITV drama landscape.



Anna Maxwell Martin and Shaun Evans in *Until I Kill You*

ITV

### What do the best pitches get right?

The clarity of the idea. It's hard enough making TV drama anyway, but if it's unclear as to what everyone wants to achieve from the outset it becomes much harder.

### What do you bring to work with you?

In my rucksack I have a computer, an iPad and a phone and headphones, I need to be able to watch shows, read scripts and talk to people.

### What are the best and worst parts of your job?

The best is commissioning stuff, being able to say to people, "We're going to make this." The worst is having to turn down really good ideas that just aren't the right fit.

### Has a show ever got away from you?

Many shows start life elsewhere. At Sky, we developed a drama called *Utopia*. It was brilliant but it wasn't right for Sky at the time, and then Channel 4 picked it up. I wish we'd

been able to see that one through, but I'm glad it got made.

### What is the most challenging drama you've greenlit?

When I worked at Sky we made a show called *Hit & Miss*, created by Paul Abbott and starring Chloë Sevigny, about a transsexual hitwoman who had fathered a child before she had transitioned. It was quite a big risk to take at the time. But I was very proud to be involved with it. Norms were different then; it wouldn't be something we'd think of casting in that way now.

### What advice would you give to someone wanting to work in commissioning?

For drama, it sounds obvious but watch everything. Or at least something of everything. Luckily, there's such a lot of brilliant stuff to watch everywhere. ■

*Huw Kennair-Jones was interviewed by Matthew Bell.*

**‘W**hat have we done?” bemoans the decapitated head of Sir Humphrey Bone, after the nation’s favourite spectres make a defining decision in the final episode of *Ghosts*, which goes out as a Christmas special on BBC One. “We did the right thing,” Julian Fawcett, the trouserless MP ghost, says confidently.

The exchange nicely reflects the sentiment of the show’s creators, the Them There collective, in deciding to exorcise the BBC supernatural sitcom after five series – despite notching up several RTS nominations and maintaining an audience of around 4 million throughout its run.

The Christmas special was co-written by Them There’s Mathew Baynton, who also plays the romantic poet Thomas Thorne in the series.

“From an artistic point of view, I’ve never been in any doubt that ending *Ghosts* now was the right thing to do and the right time to do it,” he tells *Television*. “From a personal point of view, we feel a sense of loss that we’re not going to be getting together in that place at the same time of year, every year. But nothing can go on for ever.

“That sadness tells you it was the right thing. If we carried on for another five seasons and we were all bored of it, bored of each other, and it wasn’t as good as it used to be, we wouldn’t miss it afterwards.”

The series follows in the tradition of British domestic sitcoms, centring on a young couple, Alison and Mike (Charlotte Ritchie and Kiell Smith-Bynoe). They inherit Button House, a country manor haunted by a disparate crew of spirits from across the ages, played by the Them There collective: Baynton, Simon Farnaby, Martha Howe-Douglas, Jim Howick, Laurence Rickard and Ben Willbond, plus Lolly Adefope.

The show is a logical leap from the troupe’s first multi-award-winning TV creation, *Horrible Histories*, which re-enacted the curiosities of yesteryear in comedic skits. *Horrible Histories’* success made it “shockingly easy” to get *Ghosts* commissioned – the only bump in the road was discussions between the group and the BBC about the pilot.

Recalls Baynton: “They wanted to do a pilot that would go out with other pilots. We wanted to do one to figure out the idea and road test the special

Royal Shakespeare Company

Mathew Baynton  
as Bottom in  
*A Midsummer  
Night’s Dream*

**Shilpa Ganatra**  
interviews  
**Mathew Baynton,**  
who explains why  
it’s time to end the  
BBC One sitcom and  
how new voices  
are improving  
TV comedy

# Life after Ghosts

effects, but we didn't want it to be aired, because then there would be a pressure to not change it."

The compromise was to make a 10-minute taster pilot that wasn't for broadcast. This taster tried out their initial idea of having a house full of different ghosts and playing multiple characters (as with *Horrible Histories* and *Them There's Sky One* series, *Yonderland*). But the result proved this set-up didn't create the character friction necessary to sustain a sitcom, so the band stuck to the small group of ghosts we know today, from a prim and proper Edwardian matriarch to a caveman.

"In an ideal world, you'd pilot anything that you do, because it can be so valuable to be able to change it," reflects Baynton. "But channels don't necessarily have bottomless pockets."

As *Ghosts* meets its end – on British TV at least, as the US adaptation is still going strong and about to enter its third season – Baynton, who turns in a high-octane performance as Fickelgruber in the film *Wonka*, is turning his attention to the other strings in his bow.

At the end of January he'll step into the role of Bottom in a new production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by the Royal Shakespeare Company.

He's also writing a comedy film (details are being kept under wraps) and will show off his more serious acting side in the upcoming BBC Three series *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder*, a crime thriller based on the bestselling novel.

As a student, Baynton initially studied directing, earning a first-class degree at the Rose Bruford drama school in south-east London. After being drawn towards comedy, he attended Philippe Gaulier's famously idiosyncratic clown school in Paris. "We used to say half of the fee is like a ticket just to watch him, because he's hilarious. He plays the persona of a curmudgeonly, philosophical, French sort of half-wizard," he recalls, adding: "Philippe's got an incredible ability to help you learn what the audience sees in you.

"If people tried to act up an idiot character, he'd say, 'Don't pretend to be more of an idiot than God already made you. He did a good enough job'. You don't need to exaggerate it or pretend to look stupid. What you need to be is honest about the thing about yourself that people find funny, and then access that and allow people to laugh at it."

This advice helped Baynton climb his first rungs in TV comedy to play Deano in *Gavin & Stacey*, a work colleague of Smithy (James Corden). He would go on to co-create and write the RTS award-winning *The Wrong Mans* with Corden, the co-author of *Gavin & Stacey*. By the time *Ghosts* began, he had worked in TV comedy – featuring in *Peep Show*, *Spy* and *The Armstrong and Miller Show*, among others – for more than a decade.

"You'll hear people saying, 'Comedy was best when I was young'. I always think, 'Well, you're just not paying attention, then'. There will always be great stuff and if it doesn't speak to

people have said that creators are self-censoring to the point where they can't be as instinctively funny. And some people see comedy's function as being able to say the unsayable.

"I can only speak for myself, but I know that my best work comes from writing and rewriting. What emerges is always something cleverer than I am, because in life you only get a first draft when you're having a conversation. It's not a bad thing to realise that a joke could maybe hurt someone, and it sounds like a better idea that I should rewrite if my intention could be misconstrued."

As the curtain falls on *Ghosts*, com-



you, it's probably because it's for people younger than you."

While being a dad of two has limited the amount of competitor benchmarking he's doing, he's impressed with the greater breadth of voices in contemporary TV comedies.

"Bridget Christie's *The Change* springs to mind, with menopausal women as the central characters, and the specificity of the location of the Forest of Dean. You couldn't say that's like any sitcom that's come before," he says. "*We Are Lady Parts* is another one, so is *Stath Lets Flats*.

"I don't know why I'm only naming Channel 4 shows, seeing as the BBC has been so good to me..."

Making comedy inclusive is no constraint to a writer, Baynton believes: "I've read the odd interview where

missioners are clamouring to find out what's next for the *Them There* collective. Happily, they still have the same personnel and are mulling over their next project.

"We're mindful that we can't just do a modern sitcom where we're wearing jeans and T-shirts. It just isn't our tone," says Baynton. "When we look for ideas, we're thinking, what's the playground that we can put ourselves in? Where we can do something with a heightened silliness, where potentially we play more than one character, and where there is a costume element to it."

With this tried and tested formula as the base, their continued success seems assured. The legacy of *Ghosts* is preserved, too, persisting in the corridors of Button House and, indeed, TV history. ■



# Can Mark work his magic at CNN?

CNN

**C**hicken Noodle Network, they mocked, when CNN launched on a wing and a prayer almost 44 years ago. It was a revolutionary and, many thought, crazy idea: TV news, 24/7. The all-powerful US networks were confident that this upstart rival, thinly resourced and prone to on-air gaffes, wouldn't last six months.

Instead, of course, it grew into an important and influential global news machine generating huge profits for its founder, Ted Turner, and a \$7.3bn shares payday when he sold to Time Warner.

Today, the CNN picture is less rosy for its newly merged owners, Warner Bros. Discovery (WBD). Ratings, revenue and profits are all down, due to increased cord-cutting, the proliferation of social media news and a challenging TV advertising market.

CNN's specific problems are a string of well-publicised internal crises, a digital strategy (and, indeed, digital technology) that needs radical rebooting,

## Simon Bucks examines the challenges facing the news giant's new CEO, Mark Thompson

and uncertainty about its place in the US's polarised political TV landscape, defined by Fox News on the right and MSNBC on the left.

Nevertheless, CNN remains a formidable video newsgathering organisation globally, alongside the BBC. Little surprise, therefore, that the corporation's former Director-General Mark

**'MARK IS AS TOUGH AS A RHINO AND RELISHES DIFFICULT PROBLEMS'**

Thompson, newly knighted, was hired to breathe fresh life into the behemoth, its third CEO in less than two years.

Commentators agree that, while 2024 will test CNN's new leader, it will also bring opportunities.

WBD's boss, David Zaslav, is hoping Thompson can replay his *New York Times* success, massively expanding its digital subscription business and transforming it into a lifestyle product with new content, including recipes and puzzles.

"He can't just repeat what he did at the *New York Times*, taking an upmarket newspaper and delivering a new digital strategy. That's not going to work for CNN because the brand, the culture, are completely different," says Nic Newman, Senior Research Associate at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, who worked with Thompson on digital transformation at the BBC. "What Mark is good at is cutting through, seeing beyond the way things work today, and having a vision for how things can be different without losing the heart of what you're about."

“He is able to see through this fog of change, and provide a clear direction and bold strategy that is relevant to a broadcaster with a great heritage and brand.”

“He is one of the very few people who might be able to pull it off,” agrees Richard Sambrook, the former Director of BBC News, who also knows Thompson well. “He has a unique combination of very high-level editorial and business skills. Plus, he is as tough as a rhino and relishes difficult problems.”

Thompson has been arguing for some time that American TV news is on life-support. It was, he told a Freeview Outside the Box event in 2021, “Completely unchanged since the 1980s, old-fashioned and aimed entirely at older audiences. It’s in dead trouble”.

So, it can’t have been a shock to staffers when he warned that CNN could no longer be defined by linear TV, the platform on which it built its reputation. Most people under retirement age now consume news on their mobile phones, he said in a video message to staff. Moreover, he added, CNN’s digital platforms are technologically years out of date.

A recently departed CNN News executive confirms: “The digital staff say the kit and the systems they’re using are not fit for purpose. They are old-fashioned and just not up to the standard they should be. Videos are slow to load, and you can never find anything except through Google.”

Thompson will need time and investment to fix it. Insiders assume that’s already agreed, but Claire Enders the founder of Enders Analysis, who saw Thompson shortly after he took over, notes that WBD is burdened by \$45bn of debt, soon to be aggravated by higher interest rates. Plus, it has forecast revenue losses of up to \$500m thanks to the Hollywood strikes.

Thompson is already contemplating cost-cutting measures including joining forces with other broadcasters to share resources on the ground, according to Enders. But she insists: “Mark is an optimist. He really believes he can grow the website revenue from advertising and sponsorship.”

“It’s going to be hard,” says John Ryley, who, as Head of Sky News for 17 years, masterminded its digital transition. “Television makes money, digital doesn’t make nearly as much. So, he’s got to try to move the centre of gravity, to dial down the TV and dial

up digital – but still ensure that sufficient TV money is coming in.”

WBD’s current big digital idea for CNN, predating Thompson, is to bundle news into Max, its renamed streaming platform. The previous streaming venture, CNN+, ended badly. Warner Media launched it just before the merger with Discovery and against the advice of the incoming regime, which promptly scrapped it.

The problem, explains the former CNN editorial executive, is that legacy – but still valuable – carriage deals handicap it from streaming the rolling output wholesale. WBD is taking this



on, scheduling some CNN linear channel programming on Max, including shows presented by big names such as Jake Tapper and Anderson Cooper. One of the largest distributors, DirecTV, has already warned WBD it risks violating their agreements.

Lawsuits loom, but if Thompson and Zaslav can overcome them, there’s some evidence that online platforms can recoup lost linear revenue. John Ryley believes CNN on Max will deliver additional value: “It’s the old five-pound note analogy. News is that thin strip of metal in the note which validates the brand, giving it credibility.”

Thompson’s other big question is over CNN’s editorial identity, the issue that has divided and debilitated the station. The last-but-one boss, Jeff Zucker, led an acrimonious and high-profile editorial pursuit of Donald Trump during his presidency. Zucker insisted CNN wasn’t anti-Trump but “pro-truth” but was eventually ousted, ostensibly for an undisclosed office relationship.

His unpopular successor, Chris Licht,

reset the channel in the ideological middle, but a disastrous Trump “town hall” show finished him, too.

Now Thompson must decide where CNN sits politically. Fox News’s right-wing stance serves it well commercially, securing 2022 revenue of \$3.3bn – up 5% on the previous year – while CNN (\$1.8bn) and the-left leaning MSNBC (\$903m) both saw earnings fall.

Few expect Thompson to be tempted down the Fox road. Enders says he knows the key is to maintain authority, make no mistakes and, crucially, in his own words, avoid getting on the wrong side of the culture wars.

Sambrook believes lack of trust, AI and disinformation will underline the value of a few strong news brands such as Reuters and the BBC that are recognised and trusted, and CNN can be one. “But it’s got to get much tighter and more rigorous with its journalism and not get drawn into saying, ‘Wow! It’s a spectacle, let’s run with it.’”

The 2024 US election is a huge opportunity, says Ryley. “It is likely to be the first time a presidential candidate will be running while fighting four court cases. They can monster that story.”

Friends agree that Thompson’s personality will stand him in good stead. They point to his devout Catholicism, sense of mission and a “prehensile self-confidence”. Enders says his most important task will be “getting along with Zaslav”. That shouldn’t be hard, according to a former colleague: “Someone once described Mark as basically a very nice guy, and he wants you to like him. But if you don’t like him, it’s your problem.” ■



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The coronation of HM King Charles III

BBC

# Pomp, pageantry and Paddington

**S**eventy years ago, on 2 June 1953, the coronation of a new queen at Westminster Abbey ushered in Britain's age of television. The BBC's meticulously organised coverage of the young Elizabeth II's coronation was widely praised, despite the uneven picture quality, as an estimated 20 million tuned in, more than half the adult population.

Today, in an utterly different screen epoch, the BBC is acknowledged even by its enemies to be unmatched at covering national events, especially those involving the Royal Family. It was therefore appropriate for the RTS to host an event in November examining how Claire Popplewell, Creative Director of BBC Studios Events Productions, and her team at BBC Studios plan for such occasions.

The RTS provides an insiders' guide to what is involved in perfecting live coverage of three of the biggest royal events of our times

In less than a year they covered the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, the Queen's funeral, and the King's coronation. These were three completely different events that ranged from the profoundly sad to the solemn and the celebratory, as the likes of Lionel Richie, Diana Ross and Rod Stewart added some showbiz sparkle to the celebrations.

Each was broadcast live to near

universal acclaim as the corporation again proved that it is in a class of its own when it comes to broadcasting events with the capacity to bring our fractious nation together.

Listening to the panellists describe the challenges involved in bringing these occasions into people's homes, one was struck by their collective sangfroid, the ingenuity of their colleagues and the steps taken to preempt anything that might get in the way of the BBC striving for perfection.

The audience heard, for instance, how a microphone was attached to the sleeve of a bishop's robe so that viewers could hear King Charles taking his coronation vows. On the evening of the Platinum Jubilee concert, widely regarded as a stunning piece of staging and production, the flight path to Heathrow over Buckingham Palace was altered to avoid any ▶



HM Queen Elizabeth II having tea with Paddington Bear introduced *Platinum Party at the Palace*

BBC

▶ chance of pilots being blinded by the galaxy of lights that lit up the palace.

The wide-ranging discussion reinforced the impression of sheer professionalism developed over decades of covering national events. “The eyes of the world are watching and there are no second takes,” is how the evening’s note-perfect chair, Kirsty Young, put it. “There are no second chances, you can’t fix it in the edit.”

She, of course, made a welcome return to TV to anchor four days of coverage of the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee and was part of the commentary team for the monarch’s funeral, where she was praised for her closing monologue.

“I genuinely believe we’re working with some of the best people in the business, whether it’s the craft teams – the camera and sound people and riggers – or the editorial teams,” said Popplewell. “It’s a huge privilege to work with people at the top of their craft.”

The state funeral of HM Queen Elizabeth II won two awards for BBC Studios at the recent RTS Craft & Design Awards: Multicamera Work and Director – Multicamera.

One of those present at the event was Nigel Catmur, Lighting Director on the Platinum Party at the Palace, the Queen’s funeral, and the *Coronation Concert*. He told the RTS that 30-plus years of experience was key to delivering for viewers who expect the highest production standards.

“You go into that concert (the Platinum Party) and you’ve no idea if it’s going to be raining or a bright sunny day. On those types of shows, so much of what we do in terms of the lighting

## WE’RE WORKING WITH SOME OF THE BEST PEOPLE IN THE BUSINESS... AT THE TOP OF THEIR CRAFT

is done on instinct,” he said. “There’s a huge amount of planning but a lot of it is reactionary... Lighting for TV, you’ve got to get the right balance on the face. If the face is too bright and the background is too dark, it looks odd, and vice versa, and that balance is happening in real time.”

He added: “From a lighting perspective, doing a concert in darkness is one thing, but doing one that goes from daylight to darkness is relatively challenging. You want the lighting to have an impact in daylight but also for it to be elegant and beautiful when it gets dark.”

As for the sensitive task of lighting Westminster Abbey for the coronation, the aim was to make the illumination as discrete as possible – bright enough for the cameras but not so bright that the congregation would be distracted by it.

Turning to the state funeral, Catmur said: “On this you’ve got barely any cues and you’re praying for the lights to stay on. There’s 4.7 billion watching worldwide... Over the years, we’ve done so many events at the Abbey that we were well prepared.”

Surely the pressure was immense,

Young suggested to the BBC Studios Events chief. “Yes, but you are working with a team who care as much as I did,” replied Popplewell. “Everybody involved wants to get it right.”

One of the difficulties posed by covering the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee was ensuring that the narrative of the monarch’s extraordinary 70-year reign was woven into the weekend, noted Popplewell, despite it being unlikely that, at 96, the Queen would attend the concert.

The “solution” to this problem was the charming film of Her Majesty taking tea with Paddington Bear, voiced by Ben Whishaw, which introduced the *Platinum Party at the Palace*. The segue from Paddington into Brian May’s rendition of *We Will Rock You*, as the Queen tapped out the martial beat on her teacup was, to say the least, inspired.

The film’s impact was such that, for many viewers – and not for the first time – the Queen stole the show, just as she had done at the Olympics opening ceremony, when a certain 007 spirited her away from Buckingham Palace.

The RTS was shown the Paddington video in full. “Paddington came about because we guessed that she wasn’t going to be there,” recalled Popplewell, who said it was her outstanding memory of the concert.

The King’s coronation needed to be as near a faultless broadcast as was humanly possible. Back in 1953, there were four cameras discretely placed inside Westminster Abbey and 21 positioned along the route of the procession from the palace to the abbey. At



the time, it was called “the OB of all OBs”. In 2023, some 213 cameras were deployed, of which eight were Egripment HotHead remote cameras located inside the abbey.

“Eight cameras might sound like a lot to look at two people, but I used every single camera all the time because there were so many people involved in the coronation,” said Simon Staffurth, Director of the Queen’s funeral, the Platinum Pageant and the King’s coronation.

He recalled: “I was most nervous at the coronation, though not at the time because we were on air a long time – from 7:30am – so there was plenty of time to get warmed up. Before you know it, you’re doing the coronation ceremony. It was only at the end that I

there that concealed the camera,” said Staffurth. “I needed to make sure we had enough cameras in case one of them didn’t work.”

He told the RTS that directing live events is more akin to being a producer/director as they choose the shots. “On other shows there will be several producers behind me telling me what to do, sometimes too many. On a live show you can’t have that chain of command. The director is very much more tuned into the tone of the programme. Of course, comments do come.”

Music was fundamental to the coronation, so it was essential that the microphones were correctly positioned at the abbey. Said Popplewell: “The people who have the biggest challenge are the sound team. All the mics are slung from

hosted by Hugh Bonneville and starring Katy Perry and Take That, presented a very different set of challenges, not least as the BBC Studios Events team had to oversee the building of what was effectively a concert village.

“I don’t think you could design a location less suited to putting on a concert. Putting Glastonbury on in the King’s back garden was quite a challenge,” said Chris Stent, line producer for the show. “Nowhere is flat. We had to put in 50 portacabins, dressing rooms and build camera platforms.”

With more than 600 performers and a 22,000-strong audience to accommodate, feed and water, 1,700 vehicles were needed. An effort was made to keep the concert’s carbon footprint as low as possible, given the King’s com-



From left: Nigel Catmur, Claire Popplewell, Kirsty Young, Simon Staffurth and Chris Stent

Paul Hampartsoumian

thought, ‘Thank goodness for that,’ because I didn’t want to miss the hat going on his head.”

To prepare, Staffurth examined footage of the 1953 coronation to see where the cameras were put. “The centre of Westminster Abbey is known as the Coronation Theatre and contains two thrones and the Coronation Chair,” he explained.

Deciding where to position the cameras was complicated by the fact that, for the crowning, the main protagonists were facing the altar.

The cameras were all hidden and permission had to be obtained before they were put in place. “We managed to put one on top of the altar screen. Luckily, there were beautiful flowers

the ceiling – how do you get that balance [between] choirs, royals, clergy...

“We spent a long time negotiating where we could put the microphones. They had to be discreet. How do you capture the King saying his oath? The King’s not going to wear a radio mic and nor is the Prince of Wales. The mics need to give us what we want but can’t be intrusive.” With the King’s permission, one was stitched inside the monarch’s kneeler.

“Another challenge was around the Coronation Chair. We attached a mic to one of the bishop’s sleeves. There was nowhere else to put it. We’d rehearsed it,” added Popplewell.

Live coverage of the Coronation Concert held outside Windsor Castle and

mitment to environmental causes.

“We reduced the carbon footprint prediction by 70% by doing things such as running as much as possible on batteries rather than generators and using sustainable materials, including the fuel,” said Stent. “It was costly and challenging but worth it to put on such a sustainable event. We also worked hard to make the backstage area as welcoming as possible.” ■

**Report by Steve Clarke. ‘BBC Studios events: A masterclass in major events broadcasts and production with Claire Popplewell and team’ was an RTS National Event held on 20 November at Cavendish Conference Centre, London W1. The producer was Harriet Humphries, BBC Studios.**

# ‘Men get cameras,



# women get clipboards’

**I**n spite of the righteous noise and well-intentioned initiatives launched by broadcasters, streamers and producers in recent years, two new reports indicate that, not only is the industry still a long way off from gender parity in creative roles, it is moving into reverse.

Creative Diversity Network’s six-year overview of Diamond data from 2016–17 to 2021–22 found that, among the “key creative and authorial roles of writer, director and producer/director... the gender gap is widening”. Female director contributions remain particularly low, having fallen from 26.9% to 25.3%.

The Diamond data shows that the disparity cuts across most genres, but factual TV presents a stark case study.

We Are Doc Women (WADW), an equal opportunities collective founded by documentary film-maker Clare

In factual TV, gender parity in senior roles, including directing, has gone backwards.

**Harrison Bennett**  
investigates

Richards (Channel 4’s *Bi-curious Me* and BBC Two’s *A World Without Down’s Syndrome?*) in 2017, recently published its own data. The glaring asymmetry speaks for itself.

Out of 25,242 factual TV credits between August 2021 and July 2022, women dominated the generally lower-paid editorial roles of researcher, assistant producer and producer at 68%, 76% and 72%, respectively.

But climb just one rung up the

career ladder and a different picture emerges. Men dominate the next three positions, from producer/director to director and series director, at 73%, 74% and 94%.

This is the most common, if not the only, career path to director jobs in unscripted. But for women, it’s clearly littered with barriers.

Laura Warner, whose credits include *Tigers: Hunting the Traffickers* (BBC Two) and *Unreported World* (Channel 4) was stuck as a producer for at least 10 years. It wasn’t through lack of trying to become a director. She went to art school and studied photography among other subjects, “so [directing] was technically and professionally where I always wanted to be”.

But once she’d got her foot in the factual door, she found that the reality was that “there are certain roles that are definitely considered to be more

female”. This difference in perception has been made palpable on several occasions. Once, Warner recalls, “I was the only member of a production on location besides my female producer and had gained access to an extraordinary but dangerous filming opportunity.”

By this time, she was an experienced director and cinematographer, having filmed in multiple war zones and been fully trained for hostile environments. She could also speak the native language fluently. “But my superiors called me, asking if I was capable of using a camera, then tried to have someone flown out to replace me who couldn’t speak the language and hadn’t had hostile environment training.”

Warner continued: “In the end, I filmed the situation but was flown back the next day and told that filming and location work was not for me. I was then kept at a desk until the end of the production.”

WADW identified this problem of perception as one of the top three challenges cited by women in their 2021 Factual Television Survey Report, along with being a parent and a lack of opportunities to progress.

It seems that, whereas men are inherently trusted with a camera, valued for their creative vision and therefore handed more opportunities, women are held back for more pastoral, people-facing and administrative roles.

This means there is also an element of “reverse sexism”, says fellow film-maker Jo Prichard (director of *Strike: Inside the Unions* and edit producer of *Gods of Tennis*, both for BBC Two). “I’ve had a lot of conversations with directors saying, ‘I just want a woman producer’... Men are less trusted to have a very compassionate phone call and document that very well.”

The cliché that “men get cameras, women get clipboards” still rings true. There have been recent efforts to bridge that skills gap, such as the self-shooting training programme for female producers launched by the BBC, Channel 4 and National Film and Television School in 2023, Female Self-Shooters.

But, facing such stubborn barriers to entry, many have been forced to forge their own paths. Or, as Warner puts it, to “shove a rocket up [their] CV”.

Warner and Prichard both produced their own films to seize that treasured first director credit: a film on the Iraq war for *Channel 4 News* (2005) and *The*

*Palace* (2021) respectively. Warner has since also bought an Alexa Mini and a set of vintage prime lenses, and is developing her own projects, “so now nobody can turn around and say to me, ‘You shouldn’t be using that [camera]’”.

Not that a first credit is a cure-all. The 2021 Survey Report also found that nearly three times more women than men had yet to be offered a second directing role.

There’s also a danger that they become “typecast” for documentaries on specific subjects, especially those that have something to do with their identity or background. Cherish Oteka, who is black and non-binary, won a



Bafta for their 2021 film *The Black Cop*, which saw the former Metropolitan Police officer Gamal Turawa tell his story of being both a victim and perpetrator of the institution’s racism.

Oteka believes that “the default [option]” is “white men”, “and the only times when that’s not the case are when they know it’s going to look bad if they have a white man directing.

“I’ve been told these specific words quite a few times: ‘We’re working on this film, and we need a strong black voice as the director.’” But, they wonder, “‘What projects are you approaching your white male directors for?’ Because I will talk to you about those ideas as well.”

Clare Richards reckons that a lot of these projects tend to be the landmark, award-winning films that more reliably set off the “feedback loop” of director jobs.

Alongside their day jobs, Richards and Prichard run WADW’s 50/50 Pledge to bring about gender parity. “Year on year, we want people to look at their slate and tell us who directs what,” says Richards. “This is not,” she emphasises, “some sort of statutory legal requirement. It’s just, do you want to be in a better industry? Then join us and we’ll do this together.”

It’s a way in which, adds Prichard, “people can make themselves accountable. It’s up to them to look at the numbers, and then they can see their own progress.

“At least, if they know, they’re empowered to change.”

They bring up the BBC’s most recent slate of factual commissions, announced by the broadcaster’s Head of Commissioning for Documentaries, Clare Sillery, at this year’s Sheffield DocFest in June. Only one of the films, *Atomic People*, has a female director in Megumi Inman, who shares her credit with Benedict Sanderson.

“What you don’t want is for companies to just capitalise on a moment and not back it up,” says Prichard. “Especially the BBC, which has a massive slate and a position of visibility.”

Across the board, the TV industry is under financial pressure, in large part due to the significant advertising downturn that has further shrunk the already tight budgets for factual programmes. There’s a shared concern that, when the industry suffers economically, diversity is the first thing to go.

“I keep hearing the term ‘bankable’,” says Oteka, “the subject matter needs to be ‘bankable’, but also, ‘we need to work with people who we trust will deliver’. There are fewer and fewer opportunities to gain experience because they want to see that [their films] are in a ‘safe pair of hands’. And they are perceived to be ‘safe’ only in the sense that they are familiar.”

There is some good news. The 70 companies and five broadcast partners who signed up to the 50/50 Pledge averaged 47% women directors on their factual output in 2021-22, overshadowing the wider industry’s 24%.

There’s also the fact that, despite this, women directors won 48% of the awards in factual categories at the last Bafta Television/Craft, Grierson and Broadcast awards; a reminder that diversity isn’t a risk, and it’s not just a moral victory.

It’s a win-win. ■

# A Time Lord for the streaming era

**Russell T Davies and Jane Tranter** tell the RTS why the sci-fi classic is expanding its universe

**D**octor Who is back, bigger and arguably better than before. RTS Cymru Wales was first off the mark, hosting a premiere in Cardiff two days before the show returned to BBC One. It was also 60 years to the day since the Time Lord first appeared on TV. A roar rose from a sold-out audience at the conclusion of *The Star Beast*, which saw David Tennant and Catherine Tate return as the Doctor and his assistant after almost 15 years. Also back, as showrunner, was a visibly moved Russell T Davies.

“It’s been two years working on this. I’m properly proud of it,” he said. “It’s vast, this isn’t just a television programme arriving, there’s a whole empire of work and imagination, diligence and insight.”

As well as the Saturday-evening TV show, there is a behind-the-scenes companion show, *Doctor Who: Unleashed*, a *Doctor Who* podcast and in-vision commentary from Tennant on BBC iPlayer.

“Russell was really clear right from the start that, if we were going to come back... then we were going to come back and do something that was as big as it could possibly be,” recalled Jane Tranter, another *Doctor Who* veteran. “These days, if you’re doing a big franchise show... you don’t just watch the television programme, there’s masses of other stuff to look at, too.”

In 2003, when she was Controller of Drama Commissioning at BBC TV, Tranter asked Davies to revive the show, which had been rested by the corporation in 1989. Now, as CEO of



Cardiff indie Bad Wolf, she makes *Doctor Who*.

Steffan Powell, the host of both *Doctor Who: Unleashed* and the Q&A following the premiere of *The Star Beast*, asked Davies: “Are you having fun?”

“Oh, God, yes. I wouldn’t do it if it wasn’t fun. It’s enormous fun,” he replied. “A lot of dramas are about people being murdered in alleyways; this is a lot more fun than that.”

“There’s a lot of pride in it, there’s a Welsh pride, but there’s a family pride

as well – and you know you’re working on something that is going to put a smile on people’s faces... that intergenerational span is a very rare phenomenon.”

*Doctor Who* has given the Welsh economy a huge boost – according to a recent BBC report, worth £134.6m over a couple of decades, as well as creating hundreds of jobs and acting as a catalyst for huge growth in the nation’s creative sector.

“I was always behind bringing it

here,” said Davies. “I can remember when I was young, out playing in the street, and my dad would be standing in the door going, ‘Come and see, [Swansea actor] Margaret John’s on the television,’ because she was in an episode of *Z-Cars*. It was so rare to see a Welsh person on the television... That whole visibility thing is vital.”

Looking back almost two decades to the revived *Doctor Who*, with Christopher Eccleston in the title role, Davies



said: “When we arrived in 2005, there wasn’t that much science fiction on – in fact, we kind of paved the way, especially for British science fiction.

“I’ve watched *Stranger Things* and all the Marvel shows and *Star Wars* getting acclaim, and I love those shows, but I thought *Doctor Who* is as good as those... I think it’s better than those, to be honest.”

The very British *Doctor Who – The Star Beast* features Camden Lock Market and black cabs – will now be available

beyond these shores on Disney+, the new global home for the sci-fi show outside the UK and Ireland.

“I don’t think that something needs to be international to have international appeal; actually, I think something just needs to be good... and it needs to have the opportunity to be seen,” said Tranter.

“*Doctor Who* has always been good, actually it’s been more than good – it’s been bloody brilliant – but it hasn’t always had an [international] platform.... Eventually, in May, when Disney+ really gets behind it, it will be taken all over the world.

“There will never be a time and there will never be a budget that means that, when Russell slips the script on to the table in front of us, we don’t go, ‘Whoa – how are we going to do that? [But the Disney deal] does mean that we have a better chance of running to keep up with him... it’s a significant difference.”

The Disney cash has been splashed on screen – the effects and action scenes are fantastic. But Davies underplayed the difference with previous series: “It’s different, but it’s not that different – you could imagine that David and Catherine would’ve run around the streets; [*Star Beast* monster] the Meep would have been a man in furry skin, or something, but we would’ve made it in the old days. It really is the same show.”

As ever with Davies’s *Doctor Who*, there’s more to it than running away from monsters. *The Star Beast* features a transgender storyline and actor, Yasmin Finney.

“It keeps you young, frankly, trying to write what the world is now,” said Davies. “I feel that very much as a gay man, actually; one of the things that drives me mad, and I’m also really glad of, is that, whenever you get an election or some fuss in the news, someone will bring up homosexuality, or rules about gayness or... things we’re allowed to do.

“Suddenly, we have to defend ourselves... but, although that’s terrible, I think at least it keeps me in tune with what’s going on. I kind of think that progressive politics keeps you open to the state of the world.” ■

**Report by Matthew Bell. The RTS Cymru Wales event, in association with Bad Wolf and BBC Cymru Wales, was held at the Chapter Arts Centre in Cardiff on 23 November and produced by Edward Russell.**

## Training TV’s next generation

Russell T Davies enthused about *Doctor Who* and *Bad Wolf*’s role in training TV’s next generation. “We’ve come back, not with just a show, but with a whole raft of opportunities to get into the [profession],” he said. “This show will run and run... It is an open door to make the creativity of this country be seen all over the world.”

Two trainees – working on *Doctor Who* thanks to Screen Alliance Wales – talked about how they landed work on the show. Screen Alliance Wales, a not-for-profit organisation based at Wolf Studios Wales, develops talent for TV and film in Wales.

■ ‘I stumbled upon it; I didn’t know how to get into TV,’ admitted director’s assistant **Abdoul Ceesay**.

He had been working as a supporting artist. “One day, one of my friends told me about Screen Alliance Wales and how that was the best way to get into the industry. The job came up for a director’s assistant and I applied for it.”

He was offered an interview, so Ceesay immediately sought out the director’s assistant where he was working as a supporting artist for some pointers. His quick thinking worked and he landed the job.

■ Persistence paid off for scenic artist **Luke Smith**. He went to a Screen Alliance Wales ‘foot-in-the-door day’ in Newport. ‘I took my portfolio – and a model Dalek as well,’ he recalled.

Smith was given the email address of a contact at Screen Alliance Wales and ‘proceeded to email [her] for five months, every week, asking to come and do work experience. I finally got into prop fabrication, which was a different department from where I’m working now and they gave me one week of work experience.

“Two days into that, I talked myself into a second week and then, one day after that, they asked to keep me on paid.”

How should producers navigate turning horrifying events into compelling TV while respecting victims and their families?

The Christmas before last, you might have expected the most streamed programme in the UK to be *The Holiday* or *Elf*. In fact, it was *My Lover My Killer*, the Netflix series exploring the cases of murder victims who meet tragic ends after relationships turn deadly. It's not typical festive fare, but testament to the mushrooming market for true crime, via TV – both factual and drama – as well as podcasts and, increasingly, TikTok.

Typing “true crime doc” into any streamer’s search bar offers up dozens of titles, many of them variations on a similar theme of love gone fatally wrong. Shows such as *Till Murder Do Us Part* and *Meet Marry Murder* all do what they promise on the tin.

At a sold-out RTS London event last month, “The ethics of true crime”, panellists debated how producers, broadcasters and platforms can establish good practice while still telling compelling stories that audiences want to watch.

Diana Carter, Commissioning Editor and Head of Talent at A+E Networks UK, is convinced that lockdown played a part in increasing the popularity of such fare: “All we did was [watch TV] and queue up at Tesco,” she told the RTS. “With that explosion of consumption, true crime was one of the fastest growing sub-genres in the documentary space.”

Will Hanrahan, Creative Director of First Look TV which makes *My Lover My Killer*, was clearly proud of creating such a hit, but said there were ethical questions to be asked ahead of making any type of show that relies on stories featuring perpetrators, victims, and families: “Are we doing it for the money? Are we doing it for public purpose? In

# The ethics of true crime



Channel 5

*My Lover My Killer*

what small way are we trying to make the world a better place?

“Our criteria are always those, and if we don’t think we can, we walk away from it... No matter that the commercial realities of our industry are that we chase ratings and headlines in the papers, it’s fundamental that we have social purpose.”

Leading television lawyer Clare Hoban has for more than 20 years been clearing both drama and factual

content for broadcast. She listed the three main legal considerations which every show, whether documentary or drama, must navigate:

- Contempt of court: the potential for prejudicing a trial;
- Defamation: avoiding criticism of a figure on screen that can’t be justified;
- Privacy: calculating whether the public interest trumps someone’s right to privacy.

Ofcom has assembled a 60-page

document to guide producers in navigating these questions, with provisions relating to everything from fairness to secret filming, to undue prominence and contacting families of victims.

Hoban explained: “When you’re legalising a programme, we have one of the most complicated media legal and regulatory landscapes in the world. If a programme is compliant to UK-level standards, it puts you in a legally watertight position, but it also means that there’s a lot to think about when you’re making a programme.”

Besides the plethora of factual content, expensive dramatic adaptations are no less popular, varying from the high production values of the recent BBC TV series, *The Sixth Commandment* (telling the story of Ben Field who murdered Peter Farquhar and exploited Ann Moore-Martin) to the more showy *Vanishing Act*, a caperish telling of Australian con artist Melissa Caddick, who ran a Ponzi scheme before her disappearance in 2020.

Of course, star-driven true crime stories such as Steve Coogan playing Jimmy Savile or Colin Firth as Michael Peterson, a novelist convicted, later acquitted, of killing his wife in HBO’s hit drama *The Staircase*, based on a previous award-winning *Storyville* documentary, raise the stakes still further.

One audience member admitted that, in watching the dramatised version of *The Staircase*, she had decided the lead character must be innocent “because he was played by Colin Firth”. She raised an important point: “When is something factual and when does it warrant becoming a piece of scripted?”

For Hanrahan, it’s about answering a collective audience need: “When the nation is united in horror at a particular crime and that later becomes a drama, I believe the drama tends to have the biggest impact. If the drama is scripted with sensitivities, which are crucial to us all, it’s very important to be able to tell that story.”

He added that the success of true-crime drama has influenced how his team goes about creating factual content: “When I’m dealing with producers now, I’ll say, ‘Where is the drama in the story?’ Because you have to match that level of suspense, which means people won’t turn off. Otherwise, people won’t stay with you, especially with

the streamers. So, we have to work out how we tell a compelling story and we are borrowing from drama all the time.”

Factual content, Hoban said, is at its best when it asks, “not just what happened but why”. Carter added: “We don’t need to add a level of salaciousness to true-crime content, because those stories are lurid and unfathomable enough.”

Moderator Nazir Afzal, who, as a former Chief Crown Prosecutor led the case against the defendants in the Rochdale child sex abuse ring, saw

expanding into the world of TikTok, where many amateur online sleuths have taken up residence.

“We must jump aboard that ship and try,” she said. “It has a totally different narrative tone to it. But we’re regulating it, making sure it’s fed through the same filters, checks and ethical standards as long-form content would be. You can’t ignore the fact that this is an ever-growing field – we should embrace it and try to regulate it in a similar fashion.”

For Hanrahan, too, regulation on



himself portrayed on screen in the drama *Three Girls* – the BBC’s dramatisation of the investigation and court case.

He reminded the audience that the BBC commissioned a documentary to air alongside the drama: “They did both. I think that was the right approach, given the nature of the case.”

Hanrahan, whose production team is 90% female, explained this corresponded with research he had commissioned into audience demographics: “We do tend to prefer the female gaze when we come to telling our stories and true crime, because it’s mostly women who watch.

“It’s females who watch true crime. I don’t understand that.”

Carter suggested: “Women predominantly watch for the ‘why’, while men also watch for the ‘how’. But I think women will gravitate more to the psychology.”

Besides TV shows, all the panellists have seen their work shift towards making podcasts and, in Carter’s case,

these relatively new platforms is key: “With podcasts, I get nervous because podcasts trivialise and use crime as entertainment sometimes. I am convinced we need to regulate.”

An audience member asked if, with all the true crime that audiences are now exposed to, the industry is to blame for the increase in misogyny we’re seeing in society.

Hanrahan called this “a very fair, valid question”, but Afzal said of victims, “They’re more likely to see it in their own homes than they are to see it on TV. We’ve hidden from the truth. We’ve had police operatives who wouldn’t get involved with a domestic because it’s a domestic. We need to shine a light on it.” ■

**Report by Caroline Frost. ‘The Ethics of True Crime’ was an RTS London event held at the Everyman King’s Cross, London N1 on 21 November. The producers were Phoebe Brown, Xander Ross, and Damien Ashton-Wellman.**

# The 'difficult men' who upended US TV



The Sopranos

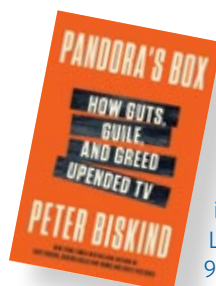
Sky/HBO

**P**andora's Box is like a greatest hits album. It is *Now That's What I call Music! Vol 87*, but for television and covering more than three decades, rather than focusing on a single *annus mirabilis*. We know the lyrics, love the melodies and can sing along to the rousing choruses.

Here we are again, back in 1999 to witness the birth pangs of *The Sopranos* at HBO. The cerebral David Chase had pitched the idea as a feature some years earlier, but there was something about the idea of a mobster who gets panic attacks that didn't fly. It finally lands as an open-ended TV series at HBO, where programme supremo Chris Albrecht spots that the mob is actually a "red herring". Albrecht says: "This show is about a guy who's turning 40. He's inherited a business from his dad. He's trying to bring it into the modern age."

He has an overbearing mother, he

**Simon Shaps** hails a new book that charts a TV revolution that began with *The Sopranos*, but questions its timeframe



*Pandora's Box: How Guts, Guile and Greed Upended TV* by Peter Biskind is published by Allen Lane, priced £25. ISBN 978-0062991669

cheats on the wife he loves... and, yes, he has a female analyst. The hero was an anti-hero, but also an everyman, prone to acts of unimaginable violence as well as bouts of melancholy. In *The Sopranos*, there were no happy endings; that famous final episode didn't tie up the story in any way that its audience could decipher. The turntable was simply left playing.

Brett Martin's *Difficult Men*, published a decade earlier, in 2013, has a significant overlap with *Pandora's Box*, tracing the "creative revolution" in television from *The Sopranos* to *Breaking Bad*. Chase is, of course, the ultimate "difficult man", the anti-hero of both books.

These tortured, controlling, driven men – and an increasing number of women – overturn conventional wisdom about television drama, creating hits that define networks.

When he was writing the pilot for HBO's *Oz* – Biskind argues that without *Oz* there may have been no *Sopranos* – Tom Fontana recalls a conversation



with HBO when he was told he should do the one thing that traditional networks never allowed: kill the lead in the pilot. Albrecht also told him: “I don’t care whether the characters are likeable, as long as they are interesting.”

And so, show after show, from *The Wire* to *Mad Men*, *The Shield*, *Transparent*, *Orange is the New Black* and *Breaking Bad*, is created in the image of “outsiders” – renegades who, in breaking the rules, come to define entire networks, as they populate their shows with dark and “interesting” characters.

For a time, AMC was the *Mad Men* channel, FX was *The Shield*, and in those faraway days at the dawn of streaming, Netflix came to be defined by *Orange*

invasion of Ukraine and the resulting aftershocks for the global economy – and is now beginning to look like a turning point. The volume of new shows started to fall, as many of the streamers panicked about hemorrhaging vast amounts of cash in their pursuit of subscribers.

Suddenly the talk was all about introducing adverts and looking for more mainstream audiences. Suddenly the streamers were starting to feel more like traditional free-to-air broadcasters. And this is the subject of the final chapters of the immensely readable *Pandora’s Box*. As Biskind puts it, “The mainstreaming of the streaming audience entails a change in values.

era” of film in the late 1960s and 1970s. Biskind has a good line in subtitles, and he encapsulates the argument in *Easy Rider, Raging Bulls* as: “How the sex ‘n’ drugs ‘n’ rock ‘n’ roll generation saved Hollywood”.

But is Biskind’s lament right? The benefit of looking back over some three decades of television is to see how the talent that Biskind champions consistently defied conventional wisdom and legions of executives to get their shows made. As Peter Roth, the former Chair of Warner Bros. Television once described the process to me: “Look for the show nobody says they want.”

And if Biskind had started his countdown a few years earlier, it would have



is the *New Black* and *House of Cards*.

*Pandora’s Box* unearths anecdotes that are new to me, such as Steven Spielberg’s insistence that his name be removed from the credits of *The Americans* because he was convinced that Matthew Rhys was miscast.

But most of the stories Biskind tells are familiar, not merely to the television industry, but also to the wider public, who have learnt to love talking about television, not least as a form of not-so-gentle one-upmanship, as in “I have seen a show you’ve probably never heard of, but it is the best thing since *The Wire*.”

With no fewer than 599 new scripted original series to choose from in 2022, the very summit of the era of peak television, the chances were pretty good that you could find something watchable, even original, that hardly anybody else had seen. Perhaps it even had subtitles.

The WGA and SAG strikes had not yet started but 2022 saw the Russian

*Ted Lasso* may be less an outlier than an augury of things to come.”

Vince Gilligan, creator of *Breaking Bad*, says his new show for Apple TV+ will not centre on a Walter White figure. Biskind quotes Gilligan thus: “After 15 years, I figured it was time to take a break from writing anti-heroes.”

Two years ago, when Kenya Barris, creator of *Black-ish*, exited Netflix, despite his multi-year, multimillion deal, he said: “I want to do in-your-face shit... but Netflix wants down the middle.” He adds: “Netflix became CBS.”

Niche and expensive is no longer career enhancing, for either producers or commissioning executives. Not when you can top the charts with reruns of *Suits*, or get an instant hit with *Emily in Paris*, described by the *LA Times* as a “giant bowl of mac and cheese”.

So, *Pandora’s Box* ends up as an elegy for those titles on its list of greatest hits, in the same way as Biskind’s previous bestseller, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*, lamented the passing of the “golden

produced some interesting results. *Oz* launched on HBO in 1997 but, two years before that, another show that could have made it into Biskind’s greatest hits album debuted on ABC: *Murder One*. This was the same network that, five years earlier, had defied conventional wisdom about network television with the David Lynch series *Twin Peaks*.

This pattern seems to have come full circle with the launch in 2021 of Quinta Brunson’s *Abbott Elementary* on ABC, a show that feels like it could have been a signature show for one of the streamers.

The handful of channel-defining showrunners have not only been difficult but protean, moving from platform to platform, network to cable to streamer and back, as they search for a home for their shows.

Let’s be wary of elegies, however elegantly crafted. And one thing is certain. In another 10 years, around 2033, someone will come up with another greatest hits album every bit as good as *Pandora’s Box*. ■

**Y**oung telly talent joined forces with execs from leading broadcasters and producers at the RTS Futures Christmas Quiz in November.

Held at BBC Studios in Wood Lane, London, the quiz was hosted by Hannah Byczkowski, the winner of BBC hit *The Traitors* and fellow comedian Suzie Preece, the co-hosts of the *Ghost Huns* podcast.

The victors were Royal Telequizion Society, a team made up of six RTS Futures members and two execs from sport specialist IMG. They won tickets to be in the live audience for ITV entertainment show *Dancing on Ice*. Can you match their performance?

### TV stories of 2023

- 1 In *Succession*, what is the name of the entrepreneur looking to acquire Waystar Royco in the final series?
- 2 Which surprise *Strictly Come Dancing* contestant had to be smuggled into the BBC offices in a cloak from *The Traitors*?
- 3 Who joined James Corden for his final "Carpool Karaoke" in his last episode of *The Late Late Show*?
- 4 Which character and actor in *The Bear* tugged on viewers' heartstrings with an out-of-character, rousing rendition of Taylor Swift's *Love Story*?
- 5 Who haunted viewers with their uncanny Jimmy Savile impersonation in *The Reckoning*?
- 6 Who took over from Jeremy Paxman as the host of *University Challenge*?
- 7 ITV's reboot of *Big Brother* saw the end of *Big Brother's Bit on the Side*, but what is the name of its new companion show?
- 8 *The Piano* saw Claudia Winkleman visit public pianos across the country, but in which city did she find 13-year-old viral pianist Lucy?

### Christmas telly

- 1 In 2022, who delivered Channel 4's *Alternative Christmas Message*?
- 2 *Switched Again* and *Romancing the Star* are sequels to what Vanessa Hudgens Netflix Christmas film?
- 3 The *Doctor Who* episode *The*



Hosts Hannah Byczkowski (left) and Suzie Preece

Paul Hampartsoumian

# RTS Futures Xmas Quiz

- Christmas Invasion* featured which actor's first full-episode appearance as the Doctor?
- 4 Kai Widdrington and which celebrity won the 2022 *Strictly Come Dancing Christmas Special*?
  - 5 The British animated TV film *The Snowman* originally aired in which decade?
  - 6 Which Christmas film is set by the Columbia Inn in Pine Tree, Vermont?
  - 7 *Carol of the Bells* was an episode of what American sports comedy drama?

### TV talent

- 1 Which Marvel actor started his career in a historical reconstruction for a Simon Schama documentary?
- 2 Which of the following actors has never starred in *Agatha Christie's Poirot*:

- Emily Blunt, Benedict Cumberbatch, Michael Fassbender or Tim Curry?
- 3 Which member of the Spice Girls once guest-starred in *Sex and the City*?
- 4 Which judge did Mo Gilligan replace on the second series of *The Masked Singer*?
- 5 In 2022-23 Gary Lineker was the highest paid BBC star, who was the second?
- 6 Which BBC newsreader announced the death of the Queen?
- 7 In 2022, which TV host was described by a New York restaurant owner as "a hugely gifted comedian, but a tiny cretin of a man"?
- 8 In which Hulu and BBC adaptation did Taylor Swift's ex-boyfriend star as a married man who embarks on an intense, secret affair? ■

<p>2 Benedict Cumberbatch, who starred in <i>Miss Marple</i></p> <p>3 Geri Halliwell</p> <p>4 Ken Jeong</p> <p>5 Zoe Ball</p> <p>6 Huw Edwards</p> <p>7 James Corden</p> <p>8 <i>Conversations with Friends</i></p>	<p>3 David Tennant</p> <p>4 Actor Alexandra Martell</p> <p>5 1980s</p> <p>6 <i>White Christmas</i></p> <p>7 <i>Red Lasso</i></p> <p>1 Andrew Garfield</p> <p><b>TV talent</b></p>	<p>6 Anol Rajan</p> <p>7 <i>Big Brother: Late &amp; Live</i></p> <p>8 Leeds</p> <p><b>Christmas telly</b></p> <p>1 <i>Ameca</i>, one of the world's most advanced AI robots</p> <p>2 <i>The Princess Switch</i></p>	<p>1 Lukas Mattson</p> <p>2 Krishnan Guru-Murthy</p> <p>3 Adele</p> <p>4 Riche (Ebon Moss-Bachrach)</p> <p>5 Steve Coogan</p>
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### Answers

#### TV in 2023

# OUR FRIEND IN BELFAST



It is more than 10 years since I joined the RTS and became part of the local Northern Ireland Committee. During that time, we have set up the Student Television Awards – which will celebrate their 11th year in 2024 – and the first RTS Futures group outside of London, of which I was very proud.

I was also part of the team that set up the Northern Ireland Programme Awards to highlight the wonderful achievements of our vibrant film and TV industries – organising and chairing these awards in 2017 was a treasured career high.

So I feel truly honoured to have been asked to chair RTS NI. I have big boots to fill, taking over from the remarkable Fiona Campbell. Fiona has been so inspirational and generous with her time, sharing her knowledge with many young people who aspire to careers in the creative industries, and I thank Fiona for her wonderful leadership in recent years.

Fortunately, she has stayed on the committee, so we can continue to benefit from her expertise as we look at the ways that we can showcase the incredible talent working in our screen industries in 2024.

It is fair to say that our sector has come through a tough year, so it was wonderful to see so many industry practitioners at the recent Belfast Media Festival, which featured an impressive line-up of speakers from across the creative industries.

There has never been a more important time to support the new talent coming into our sector as well as our established creatives, who have contributed so much to the growing creative economy we enjoy here.

## Despite a tough 2023, Sarah McCaffrey finds much to feel optimistic about as she surveys Northern Ireland's growing screen sector

We have seen global recognition for our Northern Irish talent in terms of audiences, programme sales and awards. And to name just a handful of the BBC's outstanding programmes that came from Northern Ireland in 2023, I would offer *Blue Lights*, *Once Upon a Time in Northern Ireland*, *Hope Street*, *Jailed: Inside Maghaberry Prison*, *Mastermind* and *The Finish Line*.

Sky launched *The Lovers*, while Channel 5's *Dalgliesh* returned to our screens with its second series; a third will be on its way soon.

Our thriving animation sector continues to make delightful, educational and inspiring programmes for young audiences, including *Mimi's World*, *Puffin Rock*, *Odo* and *Happy the Hoglet*. And we can look forward to more local content from Disney and Channel 4 following their recent

announcements at the Belfast Media Festival.

We've cleaned up on the awards circuit, too: Lisa McGee's *Derry Girls* series 3 received an International Emmy and three Baftas among others; Omagh-born Aoife McArdle was one of the directors of *Severance*, which won the Drama and New Series awards at the Writers' Guild of America and two Primetime Emmys, not to mention a Women in Film and TV award this month.

Who can forget Tom Berkeley, Ross White and the amazing James Martin picking up their Short Film Oscar in Hollywood for *An Irish Goodbye*; meanwhile, Ronan Bennett, raised in Northern Ireland, continues to have audiences hooked with shows such as the RTS and Bafta-winning *Top Boy*.

Our creative infrastructure got an incredible boost with the recent news that an Ulster University-led consortium has secured finance for an advanced screen and performance technology research lab to be set up within Studio Ulster in Belfast. This £138m, state-of-the-art virtual production facility is set to become a global hub for the creative industries.

Serving a local population of only 1.9 million, our sector punches well above its weight in terms of ability, entrepreneurial spirit, creativity, infrastructure and business.

Richard Williams, CEO at Northern Ireland Screen, and his hard-working team offer a very warm welcome to international partners.

Here's to the next decade of growth and achievement by our Northern Ireland creatives.

**Sarah McCaffrey is Chair of RTS Northern Ireland.**

# RTS Craft & Design Awards 2023

Sponsored by



The awards were hosted by comedian and presenter **Eddie Kadi** on 4 December at the London Hilton on Park Lane

*The State Funeral of HM Queen Elizabeth II, Multicamera Work and Director – Multicamera*

## Casting Award

**Catherine Willis – Somewhere Boy**  
Clerkenwell Films for Channel 4  
‘The lead is a special young performer aided by an entire cast of adept and brilliant actors. A well woven cast’

### Nominees:

- ▶ **Heather Basten, Dreaming Whilst Black**, Big Deal Films/A24 for BBC
- ▶ **Julie Harkin and Nathan Toth, The Sixth Commandment**, Wild Mercury Productions/True Vision for BBC

## Costume Design – Non-scripted

**Plunge Creations/Bandicoot Scotland – The Masked Singer (S4)**  
Bandicoot Scotland for ITV  
‘Excellent work. So much fun, done so creatively. You cannot do this show if the costumes don’t do so much more than their job! It’s all done brilliantly!’

### Nominees:

- ▶ **Shereen Shimmin, Abbie Williams, Jackie Young and Jonathan Skinner, Ant & Dec’s Saturday Night Takeaway**, Lifted Entertainment (Part of ITV Studios) in co-production with Mitre Studios for ITV1
- ▶ **Zaldy and Eve Collins, RuPaul’s Drag Race UK**, World of Wonder for BBC

## Costume Design – Scripted

**Phoebe de Gaye – The English**  
Drama Republic/Eight Rooks for BBC  
‘Wonderful colours and palette. Our winner created the world so beautifully and authentically. Exquisite.’

### Nominees:

- ▶ **Pam Downe, Funny Woman**, Potboiler Productions and Rebel Park Productions in association with Sky Studios for Sky Max
- ▶ **Charlotte Morris, Silo**, AMC Studios in association with Apple for Apple TV+

BBC



## RTS Special Award

### *Ralph & Katie*

The spin-off to *The A Word* follows newly-weds in the Lakes Ralph and Katie, played by Leon Harrop and Sarah Gordy. *The Guardian* described it as real comfort TV, powered by kindness, tolerance and perfect comic timing.

But it is not just for its considerable

onscreen achievements that the RTS would like to recognise *Ralph & Katie*.

As a collective, everyone involved with the show created one of the most inclusive pieces of content that we've seen on screen for a long, long time.

Not only did they assemble an incredible cast, but they also pulled together a production team and crew with hugely important representation

of disabled people. Led by producer Jules Hussey and director Jordan Hogg, they created a workspace that celebrated diversity and supported a range of different accessibility needs.

Through their work this team has removed barriers, increased access and changed perceptions of what is possible. They have set the standard for disability inclusion for the wider industry and for society as a whole.

BBC

## Design – Programme Content Sequences

### *Made in Colour – Ukraine:*

#### *The Children's Story*

BBC Newsround for BBC

'Elegantly uncomplicated animations that honour the complexity of these challenging narratives.'

#### **Nominees:**

- ▶ **Made in Colour, North Korea: *The Insiders***, BBC News for BBC
- ▶ **Production Team, *Princess Anne: The Plot to Kidnap a Royal***, ClockWork Films/GroupM Motion Entertainment for Channel 4

## Design – Titles

### *Chris Billig, Stephen Fuller, Colin Hess and Danny Kamhaji – The English Drama Republic/Eight Rooks for BBC*

'A stunning colour scheme, meticulously designed, compelling us to desire artworks inspired by it!'

#### **Nominees:**

- ▶ **Maddy Wyckens and Joe Dennis, *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story***, Studio AKA, Shondaland for Netflix
- ▶ **Ed Kevill-Davies and Lucas Roche, *The Gallows Pole***, Element Pictures in association with Big Arty Productions for BBC in association with A24

## Director – Multicamera

### *Directing Team – The State Funeral of HM Queen Elizabeth II*

BBC Studios for BBC  
'A note-perfect performance that effortlessly captured the sense of loss that the nation was feeling, balanced with celebrating the life of a global icon. Quite simply, masters of their craft.'

#### **Nominees:**

- ▶ **James Morgan and Chris Whiterod, *Springwatch 2023***, BBC Studios/BBC Public Service for BBC
- ▶ **Simon Staffurth, *The Coronation of TM King Charles III and Queen Camilla***, BBC Studios for BBC

## Director – Non-scripted

**Marcel Mettelsiefen and Jordan Bryon**  
– *Children of the Taliban*

Moon Dogs Films for Channel 4

‘The viewer almost felt they were eavesdropping on the children, that their conversations were uninterrupted by the presence of cameras, which is no mean feat. The film unfolds in beautifully shot scenes and all this was achieved in what must have been the most demanding of filming conditions.’

### Nominees:

- ▶ **Benedict Sanderson, *Dublin Narcos***, Blast! Films for Sky Documentaries
- ▶ **Joe Myerscough and Emma Jones, *Inside Our Autistic Minds***, BBC Studios Specialist Factual Productions/The Open University for BBC

Channel 4



*Somewhere Boy*,  
Casting Award

## Director – Scripted

**Junior Okoli** – *Jungle*

Nothing Lost for Prime Video

‘In a brilliant year for scripted content, the competition was phenomenal. The winner was a director who displayed such confidence in shot-making that complexity and simplicity sat side by side effortlessly. Even more impressive that this was their TV directing debut!’

### Nominees:

- ▶ **Dawn Shadforth, *I Hate Suzie Too***, Bad Wolf for Sky Atlantic
- ▶ **Alex Winckler, *Somewhere Boy***, Clerkenwell Films for Channel 4

## Editing – Entertainment and Comedy

**Gareth Heal** – *There She Goes: 414*

Merman Television for BBC

‘An astonishing piece of work. Frantically paced but the editor really understood the need for air... giving the viewer the time to think. Flawless.’

### Nominees:

- ▶ **Jamie Pearson and Helena Evans, *Am I Being Unreasonable?*** Boffola Pictures and Lookout Point for BBC
- ▶ **Ashley White, *Dreaming Whilst Black***, Big Deal Films/A24 for BBC

TV



*The Masked Singer*,  
Costume Design –  
Non-scripted

## Editing – Non-scripted

**Chloe Lambourne** – *Lyra*

Erica Starling Productions for Channel 4

‘Sensitive, evocative and brilliantly edited... holding viewers on the edge of their seats at the most dramatic times.’

### Nominees:

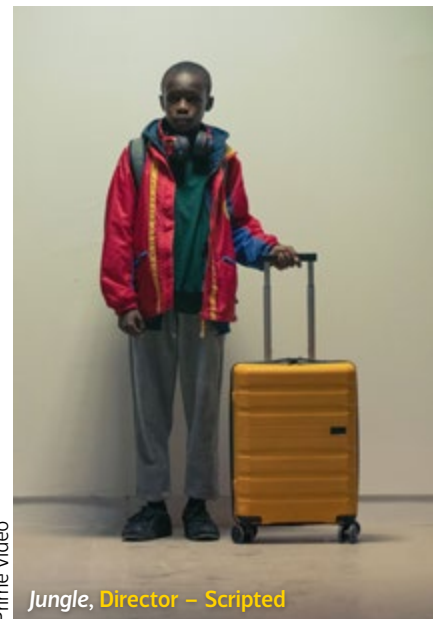
- ▶ **Bradley Manning and Bruce Law, *Dublin Narcos***, Blast! Films for Sky Documentaries
- ▶ **Paul Holland, *Fight the Power: How Hip Hop Changed the World (Ep 1)***, BBC Studios for BBC

Channel 4



*Children of the Taliban*, Director – Non-scripted and Photography – Non-scripted

Prime Video



*Jungle*, Director – Scripted



Ukraine: The Children's Story, Design – Programme Content Sequences

BBC

## Editing – Scripted

**David Charap – *I Am Ruth***

Me+You Productions in association with Juggle Productions for Channel 4

'The edit created a slow build of the tension and the editing choices felt so instrumental in creating each scene, as the takes were improvised. Extraordinary, brilliant and authentic.'

**Nominees:**

- ▶ **Peggy Koretzky, *Blue Lights***, Two Cities Television/Gallagher Films for BBC
- ▶ **Fin Oates, Jo Walker and Joe Randall-Cutler, *I Hate Suzie Too***, Bad Wolf for Sky Atlantic



Lyra, Editing - Non-scripted

Channel 4



There She Goes: 414, Editing – Entertainment and Comedy

BBC

## Editing – Sport

**Sam Bergson – *Hatton***

Noah Media Group in association with Sky Studios for Sky

'Superbly conveyed the raw emotion on show with skilful changes in pace and excellent use of music, creating a wonderfully theatrical feel to the film.'

**Nominees:**

- ▶ **Steve Wakeford, *The Ashes***, Sky Sports Cricket for Sky
- ▶ **Ian Grech, Villeneuve Pironi**, Noah Media Group in association with Sky Studios for Sky



The English, Costume Design – Scripted and Design – Titles

BBC

## Effects – SFX

**Stefano Corridori – *SAS Rogue Heroes (S1)***

Kudos/Nebulastar for BBC

'The authenticity contributed to the overall look and feel of some incredibly exciting sequences and the more subtle and nuanced invisible work.'

**Nominees:**

- ▶ **Paul Dimmer, *Hijack***, 60Forty Films/Idiotlamp Productions in association with Apple for Apple TV+
- ▶ **Frankie Waite Ignite SFX, *World on Fire 2***, A Mammoth Screen production co-produced with Masterpiece for BBC



*I Am Ruth*, Editing – Scripted

Richard Kendal



*Hatton*, Editing – Sport

Richard Kendal

## Effects – VFX

**Effects Team – *His Dark Materials***

Bad Wolf for BBC

'The attention to detail on the scale of costumes was integral to ensuring the believability of the mythical characters. The animation of the creatures was particularly noteworthy, as was the interaction with the actors. A visual feast of complex and very well-executed work.'

**Nominees:**

- ▶ **Elliot Newman, Kirstin Hall, Andy Hargreaves and the MPC Team, *Prehistoric Planet (S2)***, BBC Studios in association with Apple for Apple TV+
- ▶ **Union Team, *The Power***, Sister for Prime Video

## Lighting for Multicamera

**Tim Routledge, James Scott and Morgan Evans – Eurovision Song Contest 2023**

BBC Studios for BBC

‘In a standout year of spectacular events, what the team accomplish in terms of variety, scale and creativity is truly mind-boggling. Add to that a truncated prep period, language barriers and the sheer number of acts, it really was a very special body of work.’

### Nominees:

▶ **Nigel Catmur, The Coronation Concert**, BBC Studios for BBC

▶ **James Tinsley, The Traitors**, Studio Lambert for BBC

## Make-Up Design – Non-scripted

**Nicola Coleman – Fantasy Football League**

Avalon Television for Sky Max

‘The characters are all immediately recognisable, albeit with a rough and ready charm, feel and look!’

### Nominees:

▶ **David Petruschin, Julie Cooper and Sam Regan, RuPaul’s Drag Race UK**, World of Wonder for BBC

▶ **Lisa Armstrong and Lisa Davey, Strictly Come Dancing (S20)**, BBC Studios for BBC & BBC iPlayer

## Make-Up Design – Scripted

**Sue Michael – Funny Woman**

Potboiler Productions and Rebel Park Productions in association with Sky Studios for Sky Max

‘A great understanding of the period – the authenticity came across and it was really beautiful to look at.’

### Nominees:

▶ **Samantha Kininmonth and Suzi Battersby, Litvinenko**, ITV Studios and Tiger Aspect for ITVX

▶ **Nic Collins and Giorgio Galliero, Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story**, Shondaland for Netflix

## Multicamera Work

**Camera Team – The State Funeral of HM Queen Elizabeth II**

BBC Studios for BBC

‘What an impressive feat – 212 cameras, 14 OBs and an event that truly showed the world that we are without equal in our standards of live television.’

### Nominees:

▶ **Camera Team, Eurovision Song Contest 2023**, BBC Studios for BBC

▶ **Multicamera Team, The Coronation of TM King Charles III and Queen Camilla**, BBC Studios for BBC



Justine Evans

## RTS Outstanding Contribution Award

**Justine Evans**

‘This year the RTS Craft & Design Outstanding Contribution Award goes to a Director of Photography who just happens to be a woman

– in itself a rarity. She is always willing and happy to tackle the toughest places – high up in the rainforest canopy, deep inside a cave, out in the frozen tundra, or in the baking African bush surrounded by lions at night.

Justine Evans is one of the few people to have shot on all three Planet Earth series.

Her boss, Jonny Keeling, says that, whatever the situation, however tough, she manages to produce beautiful images and a brilliantly crafted sequence. Her colleagues describe her as a great team player and a fantastic collaborator. She mentors others and has an infectious can-do attitude... always approaching situations with immense resilience, courage and humour – and never a complaint.’



BBC



**Funny Woman, Make-Up Design – Scripted and Production Design – Scripted**

BSkyB





His Dark Materials, Effects – VFX

BBC



SAS Rogue Heroes, Effects – SFX

BBC



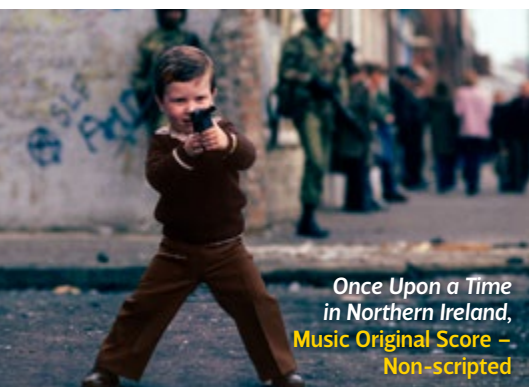
Eurovision Song Contest 2023, Lighting for Multicamera and Production Management

BBC



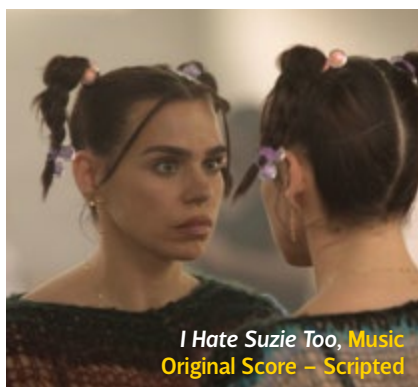
Fantasy Football League, Make-Up Design – Non-scripted

BBC



Once Upon a Time in Northern Ireland, Music Original Score – Non-scripted

BBC



I Hate Suzie Too, Music Original Score – Scripted

BSkyB

## Music Original Score – Non-scripted

**Simon Russell – Once Upon a Time in Northern Ireland**

Keo Films and Walk on Air Films for BBC  
‘A stunning composition that didn’t distract or overwhelm the stories. The stirring, nostalgic music added to the sensitivity of the narrative. A well-thought-out, brilliantly modern score that also respectfully harked back to Gaelic Irish rootsy melodies.’

### Nominees:

- ▶ **Hans Zimmer, Anze Rozman and Kara Talve for Bleeding Fingers Music, Prehistoric Planet (S2)**, BBC Studios in association with Apple for Apple TV+
- ▶ **David Schweitzer, The Reluctant Traveller with Eugene Levy**, Twofour in association with Apple for Apple TV+

## Music Original Score – Scripted

**Johnny Lloyd – I Hate Suzie Too**

Bad Wolf for Sky Atlantic  
‘Brilliant, striking and original – very impressive. This show wouldn’t work without the musical score, which was integral to the whole piece. The music drives the story but never feels intrusive... anxiety, panic, mania and frustration were all heightened via the score.’

### Nominees:

- ▶ **Tawiah and Lindsay Wright, Black Ops**, BBC Studios for BBC
- ▶ **Federico Jusid, The English**, Drama Republic/Eight Rooks for BBC

## Photography – Non-scripted

**Marcel Mettelsiefen and Jordan Bryon – Children of the Taliban**

Moon Dogs Films for Channel 4  
‘The film portrayed the energy of Afghanistan through children’s eyes with an intimacy that was charming and innocent against a challenging and dangerous backdrop. The photography gave a real sense of place and told a world story through an extraordinary lens.’

### Nominees:

- ▶ **Narayan Van Maele, Patrick Smith, Jim Inledon and Benedict Sanderson, Dublin Narcos**, Blast! Films for Sky Documentaries
- ▶ **Jack Wood, Kids**, Expectation for Channel 4

## Photography – Scripted

**Annika Summerson** *BSC – Then You Run (S1)*

Kudos/MadeFor for Sky

‘This was strong work with real variety and a clear visual grammar. The story-telling was economic and the overall effect incredibly striking.’

### Nominees:

- ▶ **Chas Appeti**, *Jungle*, Nothing Lost for Prime Video
- ▶ **Stephan Pehrsson** *BSC*, *SAS Rogue Heroes (S1)*, Kudos/Nebulastar for BBC

## Picture Enhancement

**Paul Harrison and Owen Hulme – The Gallows Pole**

Element Pictures in association with Big Arty Productions for BBC in association with A24

‘A gorgeous and rich treatment that pushed at the creative and technical aspects of grading.’

### Nominees:

- ▶ **Mark Mulcaster of Sky Post Production, Hatton**, Noah Media Group in association with Sky Studios for Sky
- ▶ **Thomas Urbye and Grace Weston**, *Somewhere Boy*, Clerkenwell Films for Channel 4

## Production Design – Non-scripted

**Mathieu Weekes/Bizibot Productions – The Traitors**

Studio Lambert for BBC

‘Incredible attention to detail in every section of the multifaceted show. A very accomplished, immersive piece of work, that invoked the look and feel of a murder mystery.’

### Nominees:

- ▶ **Catherine Land and Caroline Berry-Reid**, *Strictly Come Dancing (S20)*, BBC Studios for BBC and BBC iPlayer
- ▶ **Stufish**, *The Coronation Concert*, BBC Studios for BBC

## Production Design – Scripted

**Jacqueline Smith – Funny Woman**

Potboiler Productions and Rebel Park Productions in association with Sky Studios for Sky Max

‘A distinctive, highly researched and accomplished show within a show, with brilliant period details. The level of consistency across each scene and each episode indicates a team at the very height of their powers.’

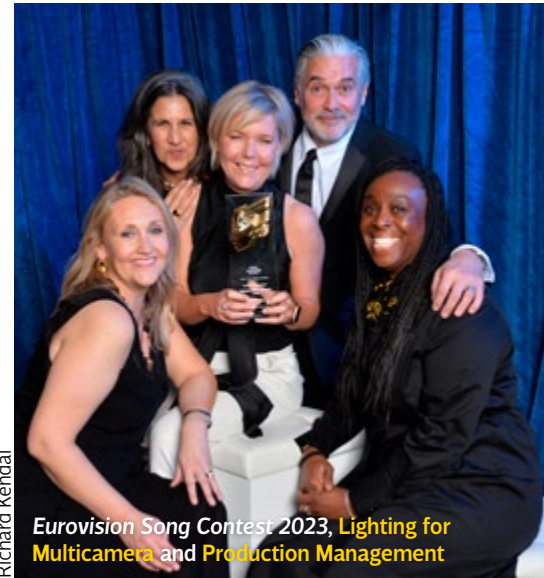
### Nominees:

- ▶ **Richard Bullock, Charmian Adams and Alice Norris**, *SAS Rogue Heroes (S1)*, Kudos/Nebulastar for BBC
- ▶ **Chris Roope**, *The English*, Drama Republic/Eight Rooks for BBC



Richard Kendal

*Funny Woman*, **Make-Up Design – Scripted** and **Production Design – Scripted**



Richard Kendal

*Eurovision Song Contest 2023*, **Lighting for Multicamera** and **Production Management**



BSkyB

*Then You Run*, **Photography – Scripted**



BBC

*The Traitors*, **Production Design – Non-scripted**



*Aftershock: Everest and the Nepal Earthquake, Sound – Non-scripted*

Netflix

## Production Management

**Production Management Team – Eurovision Song Contest 2023**  
BBC Studios for BBC

‘Phenomenal production management was at the forefront of this monumental undertaking. This team successfully delivered on a scale not seen in the UK since 1998. They ensured the contests’ integrity was preserved amidst the spectacle and complexity.’

### Nominees:

- ▶ **Georgie Emary Witts, 24 Hours in Police Custody**, The Garden for Channel 4
- ▶ **Shiva Talwar, Inside Our Autistic Minds**, BBC Studios Specialist Factual Productions/The Open University for BBC



*Eddie Kadi, Host*

Richard Kendal



*The English, Costume Design – Scripted and Design – Titles*

Richard Kendal

## Sound – Non-scripted

**Claire Ellis, Will Chapman and Greg Gettens – Aftershock: Everest and the Nepal Earthquake**

Raw TV for Netflix

‘The jury felt the sound design and mix was immersive, gritty and authentic. It gave the viewer the feeling of being there while still maintaining clear, crisp dialogue which kept you engaged with the story.’

### Nominees:

- ▶ **Nas Parkash, Will Chapman, Billy Poole and Andrew Yarme, Break Point (S1)**, Box to Box for Netflix
- ▶ **Kate Hopkins, Tim Owens and Graham Wild, Frozen Planet II**, A BBC Studios Natural History Unit production for BBC and BBC America co-produced with ZDF and France Télévisions with BBC Open University Partnership for BBC



*Great Expectations, Sound – Scripted*

BBC

## Sound – Scripted

**Sound Team – Great Expectations**  
FX Productions/Hardy, Son & Baker/Scott Free Productions for BBC

‘The balance of the mix was beautifully done and meant the music was delicate and never overpowered a scene. Sound design elements, even small details, felt rich and beautifully done.’

### Nominees:

- ▶ **Sound Team, Gangs of London**, Pulse Films in association with Sister for Sky Atlantic
- ▶ **Sound Team, Slow Horses (S2)**, See-Saw Films in association with Apple for Apple TV+ ■



*The Gallows Pole, Picture Enhancement*

BBC



Watch the full video of the RTS Craft & Design Awards 2023, at: [bit.ly/rts-CD23](https://bit.ly/rts-CD23)

# *Do you need £5,000 for a history of television project?*

**The Shiers Trust can make a grant of up to £5,000 towards publishing work on any aspect of TV history**

Grants will be given to assist in the completion of new or unfinished projects, work or literature specific to the objectives of the Trust.

George Shiers, a distinguished US television historian, was a long-standing member of the RTS. The Shiers Trust grant is in its 22nd year.

### **Application procedure**

Applications are now invited and should be submitted to the Trustees by **Tuesday 30 April 2024** on the official application form. Applicants must read all the conditions

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

**A** new film exploring the life of the eccentric Sunderland artist Audrey Amiss was given a special screening in her home city as part of a day exploring breaking down barriers to careers in the creative sector.

The film's title *Typist Artist Pirate King* refers to the occupation Amiss (played by Monica Dolan) wrote on her passport. Written and directed by Carol Morley, the narrative imagines a road trip to Sunderland with the artist's psychiatric support nurse (Kelly Macdonald) as chauffeur.

The screening, organised by Sunderland Shorts and Sunderland Culture, with support from RTS North East and the Borders and Film Hub North, attracted a capacity crowd.

In the Q&A that followed, Morley spoke about the mental health and religious themes which led to Amiss dropping her studies at the Royal Academy and settling on a career as a civil service typist. She died aged 79 in 2013, but recognition of her work as an artist came after her death.

"During my visits to Sunderland and to her archive at the Wellcome Collection, I became even more fascinated by Audrey," Morley told the audience at the new Fire Station venue in Sunderland. "I also met with her surviving relatives, her few friends and those she had gone to art school with. And, after discussing art and mental health with psychologists, psychiatrists and mental health service users, I became convinced that the film had to be fiction, not a documentary."

The production, which has an all-female creative team and heads of department, also stars Gina McKee as Amiss's sister, Dorothy, who met Morley but died before



*Typist Artist Pirate King:*  
Kelly Macdonald (left)  
and Monica Dolan

BBC Films

## From typist to artist

**RTS NE & Border** A Sunderland screening encourages students to aim for the creative sector, says **Graeme Thompson**

the film's release. After reading the screenplay she wrote: "Thank you for bringing my Audrey back."

On location in Sunderland, the director was inspired by the landscape and introduced the audience to two ukulele players she had spotted performing on the seafront. Both men were written into the script and are seen and heard playing in a scene.

The feature, supported by BBC Films and the BFI, was screened as part of a day of activities at the Fire Station. Two hundred students and staff from the five North East universities (Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside) took part in a series of presentations about breaking down the barriers to a career in the screen sector.

Among the speakers were RTS Head of Education Emma Nicholson, bursary scholar Saleem Miah and the Chief Executive of North East Screen, Alison Gwynn.

Students were urged to look at all the roles and careers opening up in the sector. TV and film production in the North East is on the increase thanks to an initial £25m investment by the BBC. For those students who stayed on to join the audience for the screening, the end credits provided an example of the range of skills involved in making a feature.

Miah, a second-year film-making student at Manchester Metropolitan University, told his fellow students about the advantages of becoming an RTS Bursary Scholar – not

least the chance to be mentored by Sue and Debbie Vertue at Hartswood Films, the producer of *Sherlock*.

He advised students to join the RTS and consider applying for a bursary: "If you find yourself in a room with people who might help you get a job, swallow your shyness and embarrassment. Go and introduce yourself, talk to them. It's not daunting because in the end we are all working towards the same vision – having a diversity of voices and stories on screen."

*Artist Typist Pirate King* with its focus on a central character diagnosed with bipolar disorder and paranoid schizophrenia, certainly illustrates that unconventional characters and narratives resonate with audiences. ■

# Brain and Brawn triumph

**RTS Midlands** Keanu Reeves brings some va-va-voom to Disney+'s fairy-tale F1 documentary series. **Roz Laws** reports



Jenson Button (left) and Keanu Reeves

**N**ew documentary *Brawn* was described as “*Succession* with racing cars” at an RTS Midlands event in November. Executive producer Neil Duncanson said of the thrilling story: “Conspiracy theories, money, power, betrayal – it’s all there.”

*Brawn: The Impossible Formula 1 Story*, a four-part Disney+ series, tells how an underfinanced team bought for £1 managed to defeat the greatest names in F1. And it certainly appeals to far more viewers than just motor racing fans, as director Daryl Goodrich explained.

He confessed: “I have no real interest in cars! The others are petrolheads and love everything about cars but I don’t.

“That actually worked really well. They would look at me when we were editing and, if I was staring out of

the window, we knew it was boring. We were making it for a wide audience, not just car fanatics, so if I found it interesting, it stayed in.”

The RTS Midlands event gave the inside track on how Birmingham-based North One Television told the extraordinary rise of F1 team Brawn, based in Brackley, Northamptonshire. It covers the remarkable events of 2009 which, if written as a Hollywood script, might be deemed far-fetched. The series uses a treasure trove of never-before-seen footage shot by Simon Hammerson, as well as radio transmissions from races and detailed interviews with key figures.

It was Hammerson mentioning this footage to Keanu

Reeves that led to the Hollywood star, a passionate F1 fan, suggesting that they make a documentary.

Reeves, Hammerson and former Brawn CEO Nick Fry took the idea to North One owner Neil Duncanson, who pitched it to Disney+ commissioner Sean Doyle.

During the global financial crisis of 2008, Honda pulled the plug on its racing team with the loss of 700 jobs, including drivers Jenson Button and Rubens Barrichello, unless a buyer could be found. In the end, with only weeks to go before the new season started, Honda aerodynamicist Ross Brawn and Fry succeeded with a £1 management buyout.

## ‘KEANU PUT HIS HEART AND SOUL INTO THIS’

It was David taking on Goliath – the drivers were told not to crash because they had no spare parts – except this underdog team had one huge advantage. A double diffuser on the back of the car, which sustained more downforce and grip than was previously allowed, made them seconds faster and eventually led to Button winning the Drivers’ Championship and Brawn the Constructors’ title. It was within the rules but Brawn was accused of cheating and had to fight several major battles to survive.

Fry recalls: “It’s a phenomenal story of incredible teamwork and resilience. It is a fairy tale, but it wasn’t much fun at the time, with lots of sleepless nights. I slept through the whole of the Monaco GP because I was so tired. I was worn out from trying to keep us going. Despite the noise in the garage, I fell fast asleep on my computer and they had to wake me to get the trophy.

“Every day then was a roller coaster, but now it’s a complete joy to look back and remember. The same passion we had to survive has gone into telling the story. Is Keanu Reeves as nice as he seems? No, he’s even better. He’s remarkable in terms of his professionalism and hard work and he put his heart and soul into this.”

Reeves went from being executive producer to also narrating and interviewing.

Goodrich added: “Keanu is an exceptional interviewer. He put people at ease, asked the right questions and paused where necessary. He really got them to open up and talk from the heart.” ■

**The Brawn screening and Q&A took place at the IET Birmingham: Austin Court on 17 November. It was produced by Sindy Campbell and hosted by Amber Sandhu.**

Over the past decade Sky Arts' *Portrait Artist of the Year* has emerged as one of the channel's flagship shows – and one in which skill triumphs over exhibitionism. As Sky Arts' supremo, Phil Edgar-Jones, said: "The show is not all about loud, mad characters but people doing something well."

He was speaking at an RTS London event, "*Portrait Artist of the Year at 10*", where he was joined by members of the production team at independent producer Storyvault Films, and which was chaired by the company's founder Stuart Prebble, also an executive producer on the show.

In the series, professional and amateur artists compete to paint a portrait of one of three famous sitters. The winning artist of each round, selected by three judges, advances to the semi-final and then to the final, with the winner receiving a cash commission to paint a celebrity and for the picture to become part of a national collection.

Lenny Henry, Tom Jones, and Nile Rogers are among those whose portraits have been painted for the programme. This year's series began with a special *Portrait Artist of the Decade* episode, which saw the winners of previous series return to paint Dame Judi Dench.

If the format sounds like a no-brainer for audiences seeking some culture and to witness some exceptionally talented people willing to display their gifts and hard work on air, think again.

Edgar-Jones recalled how persuading his bosses at Sky to greenlight the first series was "not easy" and that "it was very difficult to get over the line". After all, who would want to see a show literally watching paint dry?

He added: "Sky was in a very different place then.



Dame Judi Dench on *Portrait Artist of the Decade*

Sky

## Watching the paint dry

RTS London *Portrait Artist of the Year* has grown to become one of Sky Arts' defining series. **Steve Clarke** paints the picture

There was some scepticism over our ability to do arts and [a belief] that we were going to Americanise everything. There was a kind of Murdoch toxicity around it as well."

The idea that the National Portrait Gallery would collaborate on the show by exhibiting the winning portraits was initially not one the gallery seemed hugely keen on. But today the institution is an enthusiastic supporter; the winner of the first series, Nick Lord's portrait of author Hilary Mantel, is on permanent display at the British Library.

After the first series, presented by Joan Bakewell and Frank Skinner, the show remained a tough sell, Edgar-Jones told the RTS.

Ten years later – the

programme celebrated its 10th birthday in September – alongside *Landscape Artist of the Year*, *Portrait Artist of the Year* is among the crown jewels of the Sky Arts line-up. "They are the shows that define the channel," noted Edgar-Jones. Stephen Mangan now co-presents with Bakewell.

Both series exemplify Sky Arts' mantra, "We take the arts seriously, but we wear it lightly" – in other words, as Prebble put it, "credibility mixed with accessibility".

"It's a fine line to tread," said Edgar-Jones, "because you want the discerning viewer to appreciate what you're doing, but you also want viewers who are less familiar with art to find a way into it."

He added: "We want to

drive participation in the arts and not just have it as a passive experience. That way, you foster a much deeper connection with the audience.... The biggest thing we did to make Sky Arts accessible was to take it free to air."

Prebble said that the best thing about the series for him was that it had helped turn scores of amateur artists into professionals: "The most difficult thing for artists is getting their work seen. If their work gets seen on the programme by a million people, a proportion of those people will commission them." ■

**'Portrait Artist of the Year at 10' was held at the Everyman King's Cross on 8 November. The producer was Phil Barnes.**

**RTS Midlands** Two local talents of TV and film, casting director Shaheen Baig and actor Richard Armitage, were presented with Baird Medals at the RTS Midlands Television Awards in late November.

Birmingham-born Baig, who cast shows including *Peaky Blinders* and *Man Like Mobeen*, was awarded the Baird Medal for Off-screen work by *Mobeen* actor Tolu Ogunmefun.

Armitage, who starred in *The Hobbit* and most recently Netflix's *Obsession*, received the Baird Medal for On-screen work. It was presented by real-life SAS soldier Billy Billingham, chief instructor on Channel 4 show *SAS: Who Dares Wins*.

The actor grew up in Leicestershire but moved west, training in Coventry. His first job was at Birmingham's Alexandra Theatre in *The Hobbit*, which he would later star in on the big screen. He revealed his second very small TV role was in BBC soap *Doctors* and he expressed regret at its recent axing.

Armitage said of the evening: "There was so much talent in the room. I'm very proud of the diversity of this region – that's one of the greatest things about the Midlands."

The diversity and inclusiveness evident on the night was one of the highlights of the awards, mentioned movingly by several winners who



From left: Shaheen Baig, Billy Billingham and Richard Armitage



Vivienne Bailey Photography

## Baird Medals in Brum

expressed their thanks at being recognised by the RTS.

Talisha "Tee Cee" Johnson took home the Diversity Champion award for her documentary *Too Autistic for Black*, while Khurrum M Sultan won the Director award for long-running ITV drama *Vera*.

Bhulla Beghal from Blue-Bell Films, a child of deaf parents, was awarded the Creative Community award for going into a primary school for deaf children and

helping them to make films.

Nick Owen, who currently presents *BBC Midlands Today*, received the On-screen Personality award. The guests at the ceremony were treated to a special highlights reel and tribute from his friend Bob Warman to celebrate his 50 years in broadcasting.

In the journalism categories, *Channel 4 News* Communities Editor Darshna Soni was named Journalist of the Year, while *BBC East Midlands*

*Today* took home the News Programme award for its report on the Nottingham attacks, in which three people were killed.

The ceremony, attended by more than 400 people, was held at the ICC in Birmingham, and hosted by BBC Radio Leicester broadcaster Summaya Mughal and Heart West Midlands DJ Ed James.

RTS Midlands Chair Kully Khaila said: "The Midlands is in the midst of a huge change in television production. New studios are opening in Birmingham; prime-time drama, animation, children's content are returning to the region. The RTS Awards in the Midlands reflect and celebrate this ever-changing landscape."

Sponsors of the awards included Sunbelt Rentals, the University of Worcester, Clear Cut Nations and Regions and BritAsia TV.

**Matthew Bell**

### RTS Midlands Television Awards winners

**Baird Medal** - Shaheen Baig and Richard Armitage

**Chair's Award** - Birmingham Press Club

**Scripted** - *Phoenix Rise* - BBC Kids and Family for BBC iPlayer

**Acting** - Chris Walker, *Doctors* - BBC Studios for BBC One

**Writer** - Simon Evans and Phin Glynn, *Staged (series 3)* - Staged Films for BritBox

**Director** - Khurrum M Sultan, *Vera* - Silverprint Pictures for ITV

**Documentary** - *Queens of the Commonwealth* - LGK Productions

**Factual and Specialist Factual** - *Bend It Like Bollywood* - ClockWork Films for BBC Three

**Popular Factual** - *Fresh Cops* - Full Fat Television for BBC Three

**News Programme** - *Nottingham Attacks*, *BBC East Midlands Today* - BBC

**Journalist of the Year** - Darshna Soni, *Channel 4 News* - ITN Productions

**On-screen Personality** - Nick Owen, BBC

**Breakthrough (Off-screen)** - Barnaby Papadopoulos, *ITV News Central* - ITV

**Breakthrough (On-screen)** - Jack Carson, GB News

**Animation** - *Commonwealth Games 2022 Opening Titles* - Spark Media for BBC Sport

**Short Form** - Jack - Mockingbird Film Co

**Creative Community** - *The Longwill Show* - BlueBell Films, Common Ground Arts and Longwill Primary School for the Deaf

**Diversity Champion** - Talisha 'Tee Cee' Johnson, *Too Autistic For Black* - Discovery+

**Promotional** - *Childhood* - ReelTwentyFive

**Craft - Post-production** - Paul Farrer, *Late Night Lycett* - Channel 4

**Craft - Production** - *Building Britain's Superhomes* - Gosh Television for Channel 4



Russell T Davies's drama *Nolly* took home four prizes from the RTS North West Awards, including those for Drama, Script Writer (for Davies) and Performance in a Drama (for Helena Bonham Carter).

The ITV three-parter, which told the story of star actor Noele Gordon's firing from legendary soap *Crossroads*, also picked up the Visual Post-production award, which went to Paul Ensby, a colourist at post-production house Picture Shop.

BBC Director of Sport Barbara Slater, who is stepping down from the role in spring 2024 after more than 40 years at the corporation, received the Judges' Award. Slater, who competed as a gymnast at the 1976 Olympics in Montreal, joined the BBC in 1983 as a trainee assistant producer at the Natural History Unit in Bristol.

She became the first woman to run the sport department at the BBC in 2009 and was responsible for its coverage of the London 2012 Olympics – the most-watched national TV event in UK history with 51.9 million people tuning in. She also oversaw the department's move from London to Salford MediaCity a year earlier.



Russell T Davies

ER Event Photography

# Nolly triumphs in Manchester

*Coronation Street* enjoyed a successful evening at the ceremony. Charlotte Jordan, who plays Daisy Midgeley in the long-running soap, was

recognised with the Performance in a Continuing Drama award and "Daisy's Stalking Ordeal" won the Continuing Drama Storyline prize.

The journalism accolades were shared between ITV and the BBC: *ITV News Granada Reports* took home the award for Regional Programme, while the BBC's Abbie Jones secured the Journalist in the North West prize.

The award for Presenter in the North went to *BBC North West Tonight's* Roger Johnson.

Another BBC programme, *Panorama*, won the Current Affairs award for its report on *The Billion Pound Savings Scandal*, which was made by Nine Lives Media.

The ceremony at the Kimpton Clocktower Hotel in Manchester was hosted by television presenters Gaby Roslin and OJ Borg.

RTS North West Chair Cameron Roach said: "It has been another incredible year for television production in the region and the nominees and winners this evening are a testament to the astounding talent we have in the North West."

Award sponsors included Bandero Tequila, Capricorn Media Protection, Boss, No Drama, Space Studios, Dock10, We Are The Allies and Animal Direction.

Manchester-based Beautiful Productions produced the event for RTS North West.

**Matthew Bell**



Barbara Slater

ER Event Photography

## RTS North West Television Awards winners

### Judges' Award - Barbara Slater

**Single Drama - Nolly** - Quay Street Productions for ITV

### Performance in a Drama - Helena Bonham Carter, Nolly

Quay Street Productions for ITV

### Script Writer - Russell T Davies, Nolly

Quay Street Productions for ITV

### Continuing Drama Storyline - Daisy's Stalking Ordeal, Coronation Street

ITV Studios for ITV

### Performance in a Continuing Drama - Charlotte Jordan, Coronation Street

ITV Studios for ITV

### Comedy - Funny Woman - Rebel Park

Productions and Potboiler Television for Sky Max

### Performance in a Comedy - Kate O'Flynn, Everyone Else Burns - JAX Media and

Universal International Studios for Channel 4

Universal International Studios for Channel 4

**Entertainment - Jon & Lucy's Odd Couples - King of Sunshine Productions for Channel 4**

**Factual Entertainment - Know Your Sh!t - Monkey for Channel 4**

**Factual - BBC Morning Live: series 5, Mental Health Special - BBC Studios for BBC**

### Single Documentary - Gambling: A Game of Life and Death - Blakeway North for BBC Three

Blakeway North for BBC Three

**Current Affairs Programme - Panorama: The Billion Pound Savings Scandal - Nine Lives Media for BBC One**

**Presenter North West - Roger Johnson, BBC North West/BBC Breakfast - BBC**

**Regional Programme - ITV News Granada Reports - ITV**

**Journalist North West - Abbie Jones, BBC North West - BBC**

**Breakthrough Talent - Abby Cook, Blue Peter - BBC Studios Kids & Family for BBC**

**School-age Children's Programme - BBC Teach Live Lessons, Eurovision 2023 - BBC Teach for CBBC**

### Pre-school Children's Programme - Jojo & Gran Gran: It's Time to Visit Saint Lucia - BBC Studios Kids & Family and BBC Children's and Education in association with A Productions for CBeebies

Jojo & Gran Gran: It's Time to Visit Saint Lucia - BBC Studios Kids & Family and BBC Children's and Education in association with A Productions for CBeebies

**Daytime - Countdown - Lifted Entertainment for Channel 4**

**Sports Programme - Kevin Sinfield: Going the Extra Mile - BBC Breakfast for BBC**

**Inclusive Best Practice - Ralph & Katie - ITV Studios, Keshet Productions and Tiger Aspect for BBC One**

**Digital Creativity - The Long Walk Home Immersive Experience, Hollyoaks - Lime Digital for Channel 4**

**Audio Post-production - Jordan Laughlin, 24 Hours in A&E - Picture Shop for Channel 4**

**Visual Post-production - Paul Ensby, Nolly - Picture Shop for ITV**

# Archie welcomed to Bristol birthplace

RTS West of England

Oscar nominee and Bafta-winning screenwriter Jeff Pope never forgets his roots as a newspaper reporter. “It always starts with a story,” he told his Bristol audience after a preview of his latest work, ITV series *Archie*, a four-part drama about Hollywood superstar Cary Grant, born in Bristol as Archie Leach.

Pope spent nine years getting to know Grant’s daughter,

Jennifer, after picking up her autobiography in an airport bookshop, researching Grant’s roots and complicated, heartbreaking background in the West Country.

Pope, executive producer on the series, and producer Rebecca Hodgson unpacked the challenges of shooting a period drama taking in 1900s Bristol and 1960s Hollywood glamour. “We let the budget drive how we were going to

make it, blending different styles and eras,” said Pope.

Hodgson, added: “We called it creative cutting, we embraced archive, different frame rates and film formats, plus we had a great VFX team”

Drama producer Kate Cook led the Q&A at the Watershed cinema event, where Laura Aikman, who plays Dyan Cannon, talked about the responsibility of playing Grant’s fourth wife: “We are

friends now; she was incredibly generous with her time, I wanted to do her justice.”

Calam Lynch shared his approach to playing the young Archie Leach. He watched many Grant films and was struck by his “sense of fun on screen”. He also talked of working with a dialect coach to change from the star’s Bristol accent to the mid-Atlantic diction he adopted.

**Suzy Lambert**

RTS Technology

Shooting challenging subject matter for documentaries requires creative film-making – and trust between film-makers and contributors. At an RTS Technology Centre event in November, an expert panel discussed their work on sensitive productions.

Jade Blue McCrossen-Nethercott, who was raped while she was asleep, told her story in the BBC Three documentary *Sexsomnia: Case Closed?*, which followed her battle for justice after the Crown Prosecution Service wrongly dropped her case.

“It was a very alien experience,” she recalled. “For me, it was about ensuring I was comfortable with [the film-makers’] approach and intentions... [There] was a lot of open and transparent conversation... and establishing clear boundaries.”

Blanca Munoz, who was involved with producing and shooting *Sexsomnia: Case Closed?*, said that before filming “we always checked if Jade wanted to have a session with an expert psychologist... who had experience in understanding whether by filming a contributor we could expose her to further harm... We couldn’t betray the trust that Jade had put in us.”



BBC

## TV can tackle sensitive topics

Looking back over three years of filming, McCrossen-Nethercott added: “[My] story was told so beautifully and portrayed the challenges faced when seeking justice... [The team] exhibited empathy, compassion and professionalism while capturing my life’s most intimate moments as it was crumbling around

me. They’ve really left a lasting impact for which I will be eternally grateful.”

Producer/director Ashni Lakhani (*HIV Positive But Proud* and *Under the Skin: The Botched Beauty Business*, both made by BBC News) discussed building trust with contributors. “When we get to that final master interview, I want that

person to feel so comfortable they forget a camera’s there and that they’ve built such a strong trust with me, they feel like they’re talking to a mate,” she said. “For the audience, it’s going to come across well [because] they’re so natural.”

Polly Harrar, who set up The Sharan Project, a charity that supports South Asian women affected by abuse or persecution, met film-maker Sukki more than a decade ago. Together, they have worked on the short film *I See Her*, which tells the real-life stories of women trapped in forced marriages and suffering domestic abuse.

*I See Her*, said Harrar, shows the journey of the victims of abuse “from where they are, through to recovery, to successfully leading an independent life without fear”.

The film, which is silent, avoids depictions of violence, to ensure it is suitable for children and also, said Sukki, because “portraying violence... gives so much power to the perpetrators of abuse”.

The online event “Tackling the taboo” was chaired and produced by Kim Rowell, Managing Editor, News Production, ITN. It can be watched at: [bit.ly/RTS-taboo](http://bit.ly/RTS-taboo).

**Matthew Bell**

Charlotte Moore hailed authentic, regional programmes, picking out two hit Northern Ireland shows for praise, in her Dan Gilbert Memorial Lecture at the Belfast Media Festival in mid-November.

Discussing the BBC's Across the UK strategy – which seeks to shift creative spend and decision-making out of London – the BBC's Chief Content Officer praised *Blue Lights* and *Once Upon a Time in Northern Ireland*.

Moore said: "What both *Blue Lights* and *Once Upon a Time in Northern Ireland* demonstrate so brilliantly, is that thinking bigger about how we harness and showcase the creativity of the whole of the UK is paying huge dividends – for us and for audiences."

*Blue Lights*, which follows three probationary police officers in Belfast, was made by Northern Ireland indie Two Cities and Gallagher Films, and written by Declan Lawn and Adam Patterson. A second series is filming.

"They wanted it to be a distillation of everything they've learned from living and being journalists here," said Moore. "Brilliant drama, but completely inseparable from the sense of place and the backdrop of the Troubles."

*Once Upon a Time in Northern*



From left: Fiona Campbell, outgoing RTS Northern Ireland Chair; Charlotte Moore; and new NI Chair Sarah McCaffrey

Andrew Johnston

## Moore hails authenticity

*Ireland*, made by Keo Films and Walk On Air Films, "allowed the stories of the Troubles to be told in a different way ... focusing on first-hand testimony, and giving ordinary people who were caught up or impacted by the conflict the space to tell their personal stories."

She continued: "These two shows – one drama, one documentary – are very different. But it's their authenticity that they have in common."

Moore argued that it is the

BBC's role as a public service broadcaster that defines it in the global streaming age: "It's how we set ourselves apart."

"We know it's the stories that speak most directly to our lives, that represent and reflect our communities and experiences and sensibilities, that mean the most."

Namechecking recent regional BBC dramas such as *Happy Valley*, *Guilt* and *The Responder*, she said. "Our job is to... tell the stories that others don't, and take the risks that

they increasingly won't."

Moore concluded: "Competition has never been fiercer. And the financial environment could hardly be tougher. But being public service is our superpower.... We're here to showcase and champion every community."

The Dan Gilbert Memorial Lecture is given in memory of Gilbert, a major figure in Northern Ireland current affairs broadcasting, and organised by RTS NI.

**Matthew Bell**

## Plymouth widens horizons

Plymouth Marjon University played host to Devon and Cornwall's "Breaking into media" employability event, with more than 150 students from across the region getting expert advice on taking their first career steps.

The students met some of the organisations that might one day be hiring them, including BBC South West,

Beagle Media, Channel 4, Ocean City Media, Pushed, Rock Oyster Media, Seadog TV & Film Productions, Silverstream TV and Twofour Post Production. Following four sector-related Q&A sessions, the students enjoyed a networking lunch, exchanging email addresses and making crucial industry contacts.

RTS Devon and Cornwall

Chair Siobhan Robbie-James said: "It's been a pleasure to see students from across both counties come together to talk about their great passions for creating content in film and TV, and to have representation from different elements of the industry to share their experience."

"We have spread the message of the RTS and hopefully the students will know there

is a network there for them once they've left education."

Broadcaster and marine biologist Monty Halls (*My Family and the Galapagos*) delivered a rousing speech to end the day, offering plenty of inspiration and encouragement for the next generation of South West creatives.

Marjon student Bella-Skye Taylor said: "It's given us a confidence boost, knowing how to get into the industry and really widening our horizons of what we can do once we leave uni."

**Mike Baker**

RTS West of England

With more than 20 Bristol-based media organisations and around 400 people in attendance, the RTS West of England's annual Futures Festival was a hive of discussion. The November event at M Shed in Bristol gave students and those interested in furthering their TV careers the chance to speak with production companies, broadcasters and post-production facilities.

While M Shed's top floor flowed with conversation, downstairs hosted a series of short talks on TV production. The first was a guide to the elusive skill of networking itself and how to approach it without fear. "Even the most confident, experienced people can find networking really difficult," Vicki Lines-Gibbs, Creative Director of Bristol-based Gritty Talent, reassured the audience.

Lines-Gibbs went on to run through the dos and don'ts of networking, emphasising that people should find a way to make it work for them. "Ultimately, you need to empower yourself to ask for what you need," she said.

Kate Gorst of BBC Studios hosted a talk on entry-level roles. The panel included junior editor Joe Manning and Felicity Flashman, a camera kit co-ordinator, who



The West of England RTS Futures Festival

Sirun Tang

## Students flock to Bristol

discussed their paths into the industry. "The goalposts constantly move, you've got to be adaptable... and stay positive," said Manning.

The final session was hosted by Vanessa Bewley, with Inka Cresswell and Prue Baker explaining what to expect working as assistant producers. "You should never be afraid to speak to every person in the room," said Cresswell. "I wish I'd

trusted myself a little bit more when I was younger," said Baker, adding that her advice to her younger self would be to, "go for what you're passionate about".

As the event concluded, industry representatives left feeling positive. "It was a really good turnout," said Simon Sofowora from Gritty Talent. "It was uplifting to see so many people who are either new entrants into the

industry, or people who are trying to further their careers, with so much enthusiasm."

For attendees, the event offered reassurance after recent news of strikes and job instability. "In the middle of a low point for the industry, this has been a really positive and really exciting event," said Olivia Merrick, a film-making student at the University of the West of England.

**Seraphina Allard-Bridge**

## Spotlight on engineering jobs

RTS Scotland

The latest ScreenSkills/RTS Scotland online session threw the spotlight on the broadcast engineering department, with two experienced techies and one newbie discussing their work.

Both Gareth Gordon, Chief Technology Officer at Glasgow outside broadcast sport specialist QTV, and Morag McIntosh, Solution

Lead – Studio Automation, BBC Technology, started as BBC trainees two decades ago.

Looking back at his career highlights, Gordon recalled 10 years working at Glastonbury as a vision supervisor: "Growing up, I was in bands and, as a twentysomething at uni, my time was spent going to gigs or performing in music acts so, when I found job that was nerdy and also

creative, it was a dream come true – to be able to go to these massive events and see how it was all put together."

He added: "I've worked on sitcoms and gameshows [and] been around the world [for] sporting events."

McIntosh has also worked at festivals and still vision mixes the Proms, as well as state funerals and weddings. "[You are] a small part of the

system, but without the work that you're doing... everything falls down," she said. "It's a big machine and, when it all works, it's a wonderful thing."

Jonas Kröger-Mayes, a junior systems engineer at BBC Scotland who graduated last summer from the BBC apprenticeship scheme, completed the online panel.

The November event was chaired by Lee Davison, Associate Head of Film and Media at Solent University, Southampton, who leads its Live Event Technology course.

**Matthew Bell**



**Northern Lights**: starring Stephen Jones and Elva Trill

TG4

## Dublin drama scores on TG4

Republic of Ireland

TG4's six-part Dublin drama *Northern Lights* has been thrilling both viewers and critics.

Based on Stephen Jones's play, it tells the tale of two grieving strangers who meet when Lloyd (played by Jones) sees Áine (Elva Trill) standing on Grattan Bridge and, fearing she may jump, intervenes.

At an online Republic of Ireland event in December, Jones revealed his inspiration

for the play: "I witnessed the aftermath of a guy jumping into the Liffey... and it stuck with me. I wondered what would happen if... late at night, [it's] lashing down with rain and you pass a person several times [on the bridge]."

"I had [this image] of two people and, like any writer, I guess, you think about who they are, what they are doing, where they are going, who they were in the past and

what led them to this place?"

Deadpan Pictures co-founder Ailish McElmeel saw the play in 2018. "Everything we do at Deadpan is very character driven.... I was laughing and crying," she recalled. "Very quickly we were annoying Stephen to see if he might be interested in adapting [it for TV]."

Five years later and expanded for TV – with a complex funding package involving TG4, Belgium's Streamz, ZDFneo (Germany), Screen Ireland and Lionsgate TV in place – the English-language *Northern Lights* came to the Irish-language channel TG4 this November.

A second series is in development, but not yet greenlit. **Matthew Bell**

## Leeds hosts student supper

RTS Yorkshire

Responding to the concerns of colleagues in higher education, RTS Yorkshire held a different kind of networking night for students in November – a supper attended by 50-plus local students and seven production companies.

Through their links with universities, the RTS Yorkshire Committee understood that the post-Covid generation of

students may struggle with traditional networking events that often require students to approach industry professionals, one on one, in a noisy, high-pressure environment.

Not everybody has that confidence, and some students feel excluded due to their age or because they are neurodivergent. The student supper was a low-pressure event, at a community-run

space in Headingley, Leeds, to start conversations and build confidence.

Production companies from across Leeds sent production, post-production and back-office staff who were briefed to initiate conversations and soon the room was buzzing. The event was an experiment, but the reaction on the night suggested it succeeded.

**Lisa Holdsworth**

## Boost for freelancers in the west

RTS West of England

With the industry facing a challenging time and after hearing that many freelancers are feeling isolated and unsure about the future, RTS West of England held two free events over the autumn to offer support to the region's freelance community.

The first, in mid-October, featured two directors of photography, Michael Timney and David Mackie, plus Katie Mayhew, a specialist wildlife camerawoman.

Drama producer Ben Greenacre talked to them about their work and the outlook for the camera department. The panellists offered tips on how to stay sane, connected and motivated when work is quiet.

The second event in mid-November saw just under 50 assistant producers, producers and directors listen to producer Helen Waddell and DV director Ben Cheetham discuss the production of BBC One's *Trawlermen: Hunting the Catch*, which was made by Bristol-based Frank Films. The event was hosted by Matt Cole from Keo Films.

Waddell discussed the challenges of casting on a national scale and winning over a community that feels misunderstood, while Cheetham shared his experiences of spending eight weeks at sea on the shoot.

At both events, representatives from The Film and TV Charity outlined the charity's work and the resources available to those in the industry, from its 24-hour support line to financial help and advice, counselling and legal advice.

**Suzy Lambert**

**Shiers Trust** An almost forgotten strike at TV New Zealand in the mid-1970s by women production secretaries – angered about their poor pay and conditions – halted the filming of drama, live news and sport.

The women won their fight, achieving parity with male floor managers, who were several pay grades above them.

Now, thanks to the 2023 Shiers Trust Award, Australian media historian Jeannine Baker will be able to undertake research on the strike and the early days of television in New Zealand.

Baker, the recipient of an award of £5,000, will use the money to pay for travel and her stay in Wellington for archival research and to conduct interviews with women who worked in New Zealand television during its first three decades, from 1960 to 1990.

Her research will lead to a



Jeannine Baker

Dr Jeannine Baker

## Shiers to fund Kiwi research

journal article about the strike and contribute to a book Baker is developing about women in early

television in both Australia and New Zealand.

“I am thrilled to accept the 2023 Shiers Trust Award. I

hope this research will lead to a new story about the development of New Zealand television, one that considers the whole production environment and brings into view the nature and status of women media workers,” said Baker, who currently lectures at the University of Newcastle in New South Wales, Australia.

“Although much of women’s labour in the early decades was in production support or auxiliary roles, they also worked in a range of technical jobs, including as film technicians and editors, vision switchers, and videotape and telecine operators.”

The Shiers Trust Award, which is funded by a bequest from the US television historian and RTS member George Shiers, offers a grant of £5,000 towards publishing any aspect of TV history (see page 36).

**Matthew Bell**

## The UPSIDE

### An editorial guru to chair the BBC

Congratulations to Samir Shah, the new BBC Chair. An inspired appointment, Samir knows broadcasting inside out after a glittering career at ITV, the BBC and in independent production.

He became a journalist at LWT in the late 1970s, before joining the BBC, initially as Head of Current Affairs and then heading the corporation’s political programmes.

As an independent producer, running Juniper, Samir has a reputation for making provocative programmes on sensitive issues.

In 2022, he was awarded

the Outstanding Contribution Award at the RTS Television Journalism Awards, where he was described as “probably doing more for the cause of diversity in TV journalism than any other individual”.

His citation added: “He has led the way in shaking up conventional thinking, and in challenging established views with programmes remarkable for their toughness of argument.”

Just the man to head the BBC in difficult times.

### Diversity starts by including everyone

Talking of awards, for many, the highlight of December’s RTS Craft & Design Awards was seeing some of the cast and crew of *Ralph & Katie* take to the stage to receive the RTS Special Award. You could feel the emotion in the

room as this trailblazing show that has taken inclusion to a new level by employing numerous disabled crew and support workers – including even the caterers – was given the recognition it deserves.

“Inclusion is really easy and benefits everyone,” said one of the overjoyed prize winners.

### Outstanding even on a planetary scale

The evening’s Outstanding Achievement Award also broke new ground as it was given to Justine Evans, Director of Photography at BBC Studios’ Natural History Unit.

She is one of the few female wildlife photographers in what is still very much a man’s world.

Justine spoke articulately about her work, which often involves working in

challenging environments such as the rainforest canopy to secure footage of camera-shy animals and birds.

Justine is not only fearless but one of the few people to have filmed on all three of the *Planet Earth* series.

### Just the host to get people to their feet

Finally, a big shout-out to the RTS Craft & Design Awards’ charismatic host, the comedian Eddie Kadi.

Fresh from five weeks on *Strictly*, where he was paired with professional dancer Karen Hauer, Eddie had everyone bopping on to the stage at the Hilton as he urged the audience to get down and strut their stuff. Some even gamely attempted the Cha-Cha-Cha.

So, no shortage of talent for next year’s *Strictly*... ■



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