

June 2022

Television



The Midwich Cuckoos

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From the CEO



If anyone needs reminding of the continuing excellent health of our creative industries, look no further than this edition of *Television*.

Scripted content continues to dazzle and delight. Our cover story is Sky Max's scarily relevant reimagining of John Wyndham's 1957 sci-fi classic, *The Midwich Cuckoos*, starring Keeley Hawes and Max Beesley.

The story is brought up to date and given a female perspective courtesy of screenwriter David Farr, whose adaptation of John le Carré's *The Night Manager* was hugely enjoyable. I, for

one, will be hiding behind the sofa.

In a similar vein, Caroline Frost profiles Ncuti Gatwa, recently handed the keys to the Tardis by the incomparable Russell T Davies.

But it is not just sci-fi that's setting the bar high. Two reports from outside London, on the return of BBC One's *The Outlaws* and a documentary inspired by *Gentleman Jack*, from Bristol and Leeds respectively, illustrate the depth of talent on both sides of the camera in the English regions.

This is a theme explored by Cat Lewis's *Our Friend* column, where she examines innovative schemes aimed at addressing skills shortages.

Further confirmation that creativity

is thriving beyond the M25 was on show to all who attended last month's RTS Northern Ireland Awards.

These are, however, difficult times for public service broadcasters. Claire Enders provides a comprehensive report on how PSBs are under threat across Europe, particularly in France.

Finally, it was a pleasure to see so many of you at our recent national event at which Jay Hunt interviewed Ben Frow. We report this high-energy and candid encounter in full.

Theresa Wise

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TV diary

Wake up to an item on Radio 4's *Today* about the shortage of HRT

drugs. Women are resorting to trading them illegally in car parks. The Government has had to appoint an "HRT tsar". A pharmaceutical executive explains it is partly to do with supply chain problems but mostly the result of a surge in demand triggered by a Channel 4 documentary presented by Davina McCall last year.

Now Davina has made a follow-up film and people are worried that even more women will have the temerity to ask for treatment.

It's one of those moments that reminds you of the extraordinary power TV has to create change. But also of the irony that the greatest recent achievement of a channel designed to serve young viewers may be shattering the taboo around the menopause. Who says Channel 4 is becoming middle-aged?

■ **Drop in to a screening for MPs of the final extended episode of *Derry Girls*. The timing is uncanny. The episode takes place on the day of Northern Ireland's historic vote to embrace the Good Friday Agreement. Now, Brexit has thrown the province into political crisis again and the Prime Minister is threatening to unpick the deal he signed.**

But there's no sign of political tension at Bafta, where DUP, SDLP, Labour, Tory, Lib Dem and SNP MPs – including Ian Paisley jnr, whose



Channel 4

Ian Katz marvels at TV's power as a change maker and ability to unite MPs from all sides

firebrand father features several times in *Derry Girls* – mingle, swapping favourite moments from Lisa McGee's joyous, heart-warming sitcom. It would take the constitution of Sister Michael not to be moved by the sight of a group of people who disagree about so much united by their love of a transcendent piece of TV.

■ A few days later, answering questions from MPs at the DCMS Committee, culture secretary Nadine Dorries three times cites *Derry Girls*, along with *Gogglebox*, as an example of the kind of distinctively British programmes that a privatised Channel 4 will continue to commission. They are curious examples to choose since the creators of both shows have spoken publicly about how they do

not believe either would have been made by a profit-driven broadcaster.

■ **At a meeting in the offices of Eleven Film, I am confronted with a giant and fabulously glamorous photo of the cast of its breakthrough hit, *Sex Education*. I am reminded that the show began life as a Channel 4 development and was picked up by Netflix after the channel passed on it. How different was the version Netflix greenlit, I ask Eleven Managing Director Jamie Campbell. "Oh, pretty much verbatim," he says.**

Happily, this one wasn't on my watch, but every channel controller has a painful list of the Ones That Got Away. Our scheduling supremo Kiran Nataraja likes to remind me that one of my first acts on arriving at Channel 4 was to authorise a bid to acquire a new thriller but to cap it at a modest sum because it was "no great shakes". The show was called *Killing Eve*.

■ ***Big Boys*, a new sitcom based on the life of comedian Jack Rooke, lands wonderfully. It's a warm and touching exploration of grief, sexuality, coming of age and male friendship.**

"One of the most funny, tender, profound sad-happy comedies I've seen this year," says *The Times*. "Evokes the mighty *Sex Education*," says *The Guardian*. On social media, there is a tide of love. It's too early to tell if it will be a hit – comedies take time to find their audience. But at least I know for sure it won't be joining the list of Ones That Got Away.

Ian Katz is chief content officer of Channel 4.

COMFORT CLASSIC

British telly was a right old cockney knees up in the 1980s, with Peckham's *Only Fools and Horses* bossing it on the BBC and Shepherd's Bush's *Minder* the guvnah on ITV.

Both drew huge audiences but the TV critics were a little sniffy about *Minder*, preferring John Sullivan's sitcom to the comic tales of ex-boxer and old lag Terry McCann and wheeler-dealer Arthur Daley.

Dennis Waterman, who died last month, was the "minder", or body-guard of the show's title, and he would have been justified in sorting out the critics. Certainly, in its grittier early series, *Minder*'s writing was razor sharp and the comic jousting of Terry and Arthur a delight.

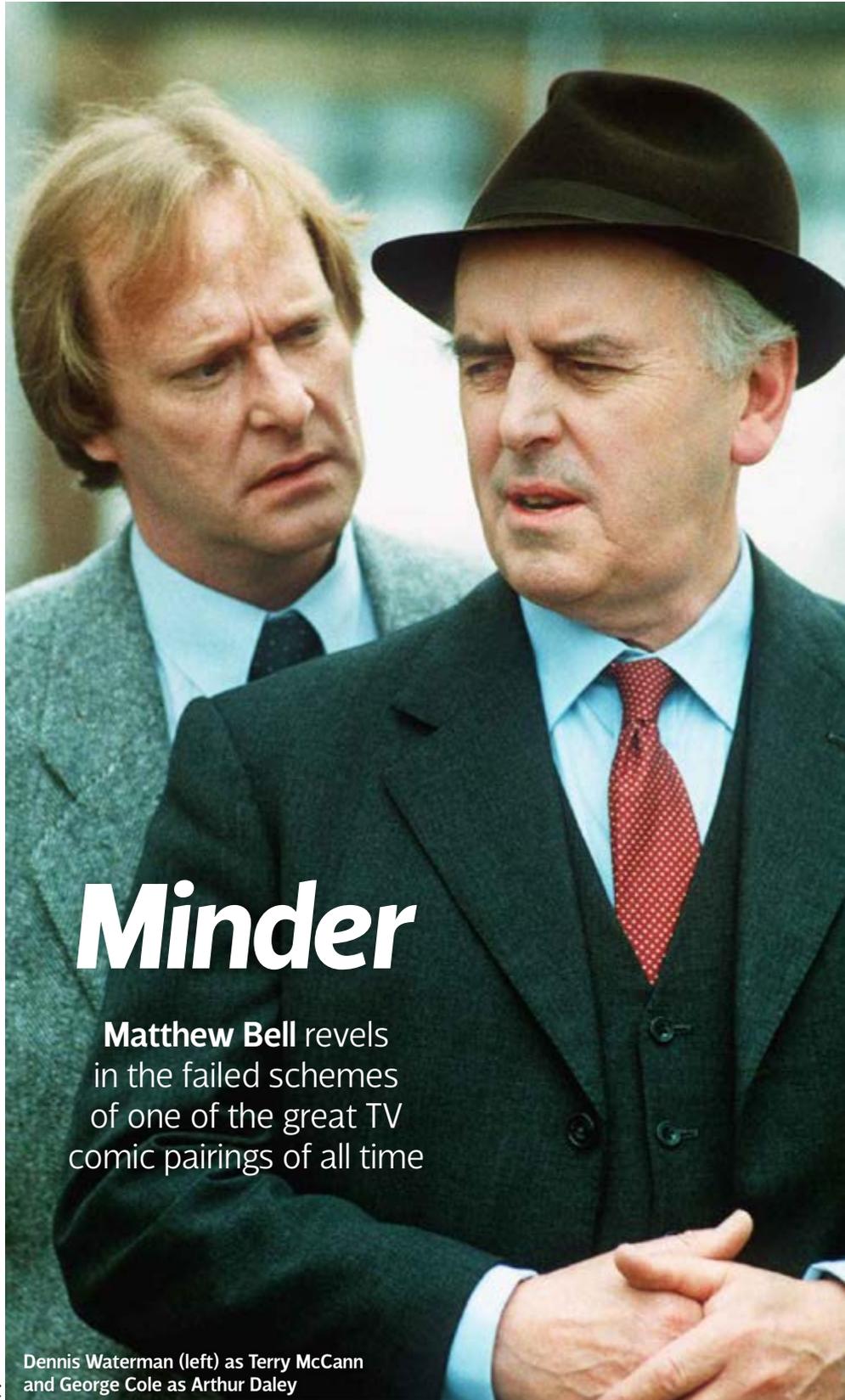
A glorious array of supporting characters – above all, Patrick Malahide's morose copper, "Cheerful Charlie" Chisholm, and Glynn Edwards' Dave, barman at the low-life private members' club, The Winchester – added hugely to the show.

Minder was created by writer Leon Griffiths, initially as a vehicle for Waterman, who had made his name playing detective sergeant George Carter in *The Sweeney*. As the BFI pointed out in its obituary, *Minder* showcased "Waterman's deceptively deft skills as an actor". The part required him to be a traditional tough guy and ladies' man, but also vulnerable and hapless – the fall guy when Arthur's scams unwound.

Waterman also sang the theme tune, *I Could Be So Good for You*, a trick he repeated on the title song *It's Alright* on his third long-running series, *New Tricks*, where he returned to the right side of the law, playing retired cop Gerry Standing.

It became rapidly apparent to the producer, Euston Films, that the relationship between Terry and Arthur was the heartbeat of the show, which earned George Cole equal screen time and billing with Waterman.

Arthur is a greedy, cowardly, dodgy



Minder

Matthew Bell revels in the failed schemes of one of the great TV comic pairings of all time

Dennis Waterman (left) as Terry McCann and George Cole as Arthur Daley

ITV

Ear candy

used-car dealer, forever sacrificing Terry to a beating or a night in the cells. He should be a comic monster but, thanks to Cole's comic chops – the actor was best known at the time as the spiv, Flash Harry, in the *St Trinian's* films – Arthur becomes a lovable rogue.

Always on the hunt for a “nice little earner”, Arthur – like the equally deluded “Del Boy” Trotter in *Only Fools and Horses* – sees himself as a successful small businessman, the embodiment of the get-rich-quick 1980s. Equally, Rodney in *Only Fools* and *Minder's* Terry are peas from the same pod – put upon and long-suffering.

The glory years of the two shows span, almost identically, those of Margaret Thatcher in *Downing Street*, and any satire on Thatcherism was very much intended.

Waterman bowed out after series 7, feeling the scripts had lost their sharpness but *Minder* continued without him – TV never likes ending a show at its peak. Terry emigrated to Australia and was replaced by a new character, Arthur's nephew Ray Daley, played by Gary Webster, who, conveniently, could also handle himself in a tear up.

Three series later, in 1994, *Minder* bowed out (though Channel 5 disastrously and briefly revived it 15 years later) with an episode titled *The Long Good Thursday*, with Ray, Dave and – at last – Arthur, taken away in the back of a police van.

To the end, Arthur remains utterly oblivious to his true self, protesting: “I spend my life worrying about my fellow man, my friends, my family; making sure her indoors has a crust, pushing the economy of this septic isle ever upwards with my entrepreneurial skills..”

“I don't understand – why me, why me? Have I not always conducted my life with decency and dignity? Have the time-honoured values of yesteryear deteriorated to the point where there is no place left in the black economy for men of vision?” ■

***Minder* is on ITV4 and BritBox.**



Something Else

There's an old showbiz saying along the lines of, “You don't rewrite a hit”. And so it is with Mark Kermode and Simon Mayo's *Take* podcast.

The pair left the BBC at the beginning of April and their new podcast is nothing new, but it's nice to have them back and bickering like an old married, cinema-obsessed couple.

The formula for their trademark “wittertainment” simply didn't need updating: Kermode passionately praising and picking apart the week's film releases, Mayo calmly keeping him in check.

The LTLs (long-term listeners) can rest assured that they haven't been forgotten: the running jokes still run.

In fact, the very first review picks up on unfinished business, as Kermode finally appraises *Uncharted* after months of Mayo pestering him to do so during “them days”.

The verdict? That it's a video game adaptation so derivative that it's actually “solidly charted”.

The rest of the hit list is as eclectic as ever: Nick Cave's new movie, *This Much I Know to Be True*, Danish film *Wild Men* and *Cabaret's* 50th anniversary, among others.

Given the blurring of the boundary between film and television, they also review select small-screen series – examples of so-called “film-adjacent television”.

The headline guest for episode 1 is the always-engaging Tom Hiddleston, discussing his role in Apple TV+'s *The Essex Serpent*.

The double act reached their 21st broadcasting anniversary this year and you can tell. Like any sane person, I'm inclined to skip the commercials, but so fine-tuned is their dry back-and-forth that they had me chuckling along to a Nord VPN ad.

Till death do them part. ■
Harry Bennett

WORKING LIVES

Sound editor

Alan Bennett's *Talking Heads*, with Maxine Peake

BBC

Emma Butt works across drama and documentary, recently mixing the sound for the BBC One series *Alan Bennett's Talking Heads* and Amazon Prime film *Arsène Wenger: Invincible*. Having spent the first decade of her working life in Dublin – where she worked on Lenny Abrahamson's much-loved film *What Richard Did* – she now freelances in the UK.

What does the job involve?

There are two sides to the job: the dialogue and the sound effects. For the first, I take the dialogue recorded on set and remove the background noise, making it as clear as possible.

I also create an ADR (automated dialogue replacement) list for any lines of dialogue that we either can't tidy up, have been mumbled or added to the script – actors have to re-record them in the studio. I then add sound effects not recorded on set such as cars passing by or footsteps.

Do you create these sounds?

Some of them, yes. But anything I can't find in a sound effects library – usually sounds created by human movement – is created by a **Foley artist**. They mimic an actor's actions to add authenticity to the sound in post-production.

How did you become a sound editor?

I wanted to work in music, so I studied sound engineering at university, Pulse College in Dublin, but the course also covered TV and radio sound.

I applied for work at music studios and post-production facilities, and Dublin post-production house Screen Scene was the first to offer me a job. I worked as a runner, then as an audio assistant and worked my way up the company. I stayed there for nine years.

What was the first TV programme you worked on?

An RTÉ programme for deaf viewers called *Hands On* – it sounds strange,

but deaf programming still needs a sound mix. It was a good show to train on – the clients were lovely and it wasn't complicated.

Why did you move to the UK?

I wanted to specialise in drama but there were three or four sound mixers ahead of me at Screen Scene. I decided to move to the UK, but it was difficult at the beginning because the industry here doesn't pay much attention to Irish credits, even though I'd worked on big shows shot in Ireland such as *Ripper Street* and *Game of Thrones*.

I experienced bullying at a couple of production houses, before deciding to go freelance. I had no safety net – either I made it or went back to my family in Dublin. So far, it's going well.

Is bullying a problem in the post-production sector?

Yes. Because of the intense pressure to meet delivery dates, you work really

long hours with little support. It's one of the reasons you see so few women, who are more likely to have caring responsibilities, on staff at facilities – they want you to be at their beck and call at all times.

How long do you have to work on a programme?

I work in both documentary and drama – starting out in Ireland, where the TV and film industry is small, sound editors don't tend to specialise: they work across genres.

With drama, I get 10 days on an hour-long episode to edit the dialogue. That would include supervising the ADR sessions and cutting in the replacement dialogue. A sound-effects editor would get about the same amount of time.

With a documentary, you get three days, and often there's only one person doing all of the sound editing. A lot of the time, I'm working on a programme right up until transmission.

Where do you work?

It's a 50/50 split between home and facilities houses. It's a good work-life balance.

What do you need to do your job?

A computer, a good set of speakers and sound software Pro Tools.

What's the balance between technical know-how and artistic flair?

It depends on the content of a job; some programmes require more sound design and effects, and the editor therefore needs flair and creativity. A straightforward programme with talking heads demands good sound clarity, which requires greater technical skills.

Can everything, as people often say, be fixed in the edit?

It's not always fixable – getting the sound right on set matters.

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

If there's a battle scene in a show, the sound isn't recorded on the shoot – and we don't rely on stock sound



Amazon Prime

effects. Instead, we use a "loop group" of about 10 actors, who come into the studio, stand in front of a mic, and scream and shout as if they're fighting.

What are the best and worst parts of the job?

A happy client at the end of the sound mix – sound post-production is usually the last part of the process, so that's where the client gets to see everything they've been working for on a programme come to life. It can be a beautiful moment.

The bad parts are long days, moving schedules and tricky clients, but the final mix makes up for all of those. I love the job – I couldn't imagine doing anything else.

How has the job changed since you started?

I've been working in sound for 15 years; I started when I was 19. As a freelancer, you now have to be on call 24/7 – clients expect a reply from you at any time of the day.

Technology has improved over the years – we now have software that can identify the human voice and remove all the background noise around it.

The problem is that, although we still get the same amount of time to work on a programme, clients' expectations have increased. Because of the new tech, they expect us to do more and more to clean and polish the sound. In the past, they were more accepting of "noisy" pieces of dialogue.

What are the best things you've worked on?

Lenny Abrahamson's *What Richard Did*, an absolutely beautiful movie. Recently, I loved working on the Amazon documentary *Arsène Wenger: Invincible* and BBC One's *Alan Bennett's Talking Heads*.

What advice would you give to someone wanting to become a sound editor?

You don't necessarily have to go to university, but you do need to know how to use the software – get the free version of Pro Tools and practise. Then, apply to post-production houses for runner positions and work your way up the ranks.

You recently wrote a report, "Diversity in post-production sound", for the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity – is sound becoming more diverse?

Gender diversity has improved but, in terms of black and ethnic minority diversity, we have a long, long way to go – and it's even worse for disability. Some companies are really good and look beyond middle-aged white men, but most facilities don't.

A lot of sound specialists are freelance but the people who hire tend to rely on their contacts books, which are filled with the names of people they've worked with for the past 10 or 20 years, when there was little diversity in the industry. They need to change the way they hire.

What TV series or genre would you love to work on?

A space show – we don't know what space sounds like, so I would get to make up sounds. ■

Sound editor Emma Butt was interviewed by Matthew Bell.



Sky

The Midwich Cuckoos

Mummy's little nightmares

A wide-eyed couple moving out of London. A single mother re-entering dating life. A prep school teacher working late. An illicit affair. Welcome to Midwich, a seemingly normal suburban town – until the day something strange happens and many of its residents are temporarily left unconscious. After they wake, the women of child-bearing age discover they're pregnant. When the children are born, they're not quite human.

Depicting relatable characters and eerie children alongside thought-provoking questions, John Wyndham's 1957 sci-fi novel is a story for the ages,

Sky has recast sci-fi classic *The Midwich Cuckoos* from a female perspective, reports **Shilpa Ganatra**

and it's been given a 2022 update courtesy of Sky Max and an all-star cast that includes Keeley Hawes, Max Beesley, Aisling Loftus, Ukweli Roach and Synnove Karlsen.

"The novel is a classic, and yet has never been adapted for TV, so there was an opportunity to tell a story that still has unnerving contemporary

resonance," says Manpreet Dosanjh, commissioning editor at Sky Studios. "It has all the ingredients of the classic genre piece Sky is known for – thrilling, cinematic, action-packed, but set within a very recognisable British community. That was a proposition that felt uniquely Sky."

Until now, the story has been most famously portrayed as *Village of the Damned*, the 1960 cult movie later reworked by *Halloween* director John Carpenter. Both gave Wyndham's story a higher profile, but this also made obtaining the rights to retell the story trickier. Robert Cheek, Route 24 executive producer, who co-produced the series explains: "We have an overall

deal with the estate of John Wyndham but its rights were very complex because there's John Wyndham's estate, the estate of his wife, and then there are the remake rights from the original film which went through Warner Bros. It was a big mess of complexity."

With Snowed-In Productions brought in as co-producers to disentangle the issue, the project was free to begin at the start of 2019.

The subsequent pandemic that affected its filming schedule provided an added sense of relevance to Wyndham's sci-fi. "In a lot of John Wyndham stories, one thing changes in the ordinary world, but this has such implications that the way we all live is suddenly exposed," says Cheek. "Walking through central London when there was nobody there, as I did during lockdown, is an image straight from *The Day of the Triffids* [another of Wyndham's novels]. It was like the world caught up with us in a way that was not good."

Much of the series' other resonance was intentional. Cheek brought in long-time acquaintance David Farr (who adapted John le Carré's *The Night Manager* for BBC One and Philip K Dick's *Electric Dreams* for Channel 4) to write the screenplay. Farr reworked the story into a contemporary eight-parter that takes prime position in Sky's summer slate.

Wyndham's original story was written under the weight of the cold war, but, for today's audience, Farr teased out a newer crisis – humankind's future on Planet Earth. "I think young people, particularly, feel that humanity is deeply flawed," he says. "We're questioning, are we coming to an end? Is there a better form? Is there a more efficient species? I think *The Midwich Cuckoos* speaks beautifully to that in a way that asks questions about our own responsibilities.

"The wonderful thing about metaphorical stories or allegories is that they're fluid and can shift and change for different times and different places."

Farr changed specific elements, too. Midwich itself has morphed from a small village to a well-to-do commuter town on London's outskirts. And the Children are no longer represented as having no genetic resemblance to their mothers; in the novel, the Children all have unusual golden eyes, light, blonde hair and pale, silvery skin.

"I'm aware this change will be the most controversial among the sci-fi

nuts," Farr says. "But they have to be able to smuggle themselves into our world. The original story relies upon an era where it was easy for the Children to be kept secret from the world at large. Our world is about super-exposure. There are still lots of secrets, but somehow they're not kept in obvious darkness." Plus, in mimicking their mothers, "they're more like cuckoos than the originals".

"The book is beautiful in itself, it's a classic," he continues. "But it's about making it resonate for us now and not feel in any sense like a museum piece. I did that a little bit with *The Night*



The Midwich Cuckoos

Sky

Manager, which was only 20 years old, but with anything that has a dated element to it, you have to make it work in your world."

The series's striking tone – its moody feel, confident pace and stylish visuals – was initially laid out by director Alice Troughton (*Doctor Who*, *Baghdad Central*) in a mood board. Leafing through it, with eerie images of too-perfect white picket fences and people dramatically passed out, it's certainly transferred to screen. Within the team effort, she cites the contributions of cinematographer David Katznelson (*The Rescue*, *It's a Sin*) and RTS-award-winning composer Hannah Peel, nominated for last year's Mercury Prize.

Farr's sparse script left room for cinematic elements, which helped, too. "Hitchcock is probably my ultimate film-maker and, for him, it's less about dialogue and more about what's happening in the space," he says. "I try to write something that encourages directors like Alice to explore that."

The writer also wanted it to be told from a female perspective to rebalance the story for a modern-day audience; essentially, the story revolves around

motherhood. As part of this, he switched the central character of Zellaby, a therapist played by Keeley Hawes, from a man to a woman – "a listener not a lecturer".

For Troughton, as both a Wyndham fan and a female director, directing this much-loved sci-fi story was "like getting the keys to the kingdom". She says: "I've done English home-grown sci-fi, such as *Doctor Who*, *Torchwood* and *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, and also the westerns *Tin Star* and *Baghdad Central*. In the earlier days of my career, I felt like I was banging at the doors. There's a certain auteurship behind certain genres, but I

like smashing down genres that we haven't been allowed into."

Of her direction of the series, she says: "Female gaze is now a misused phrase, because it's anything other than the established male, white gaze. It should be inclusive of the people who haven't had the chance to be the subject, rather than the object, of the director's lens.

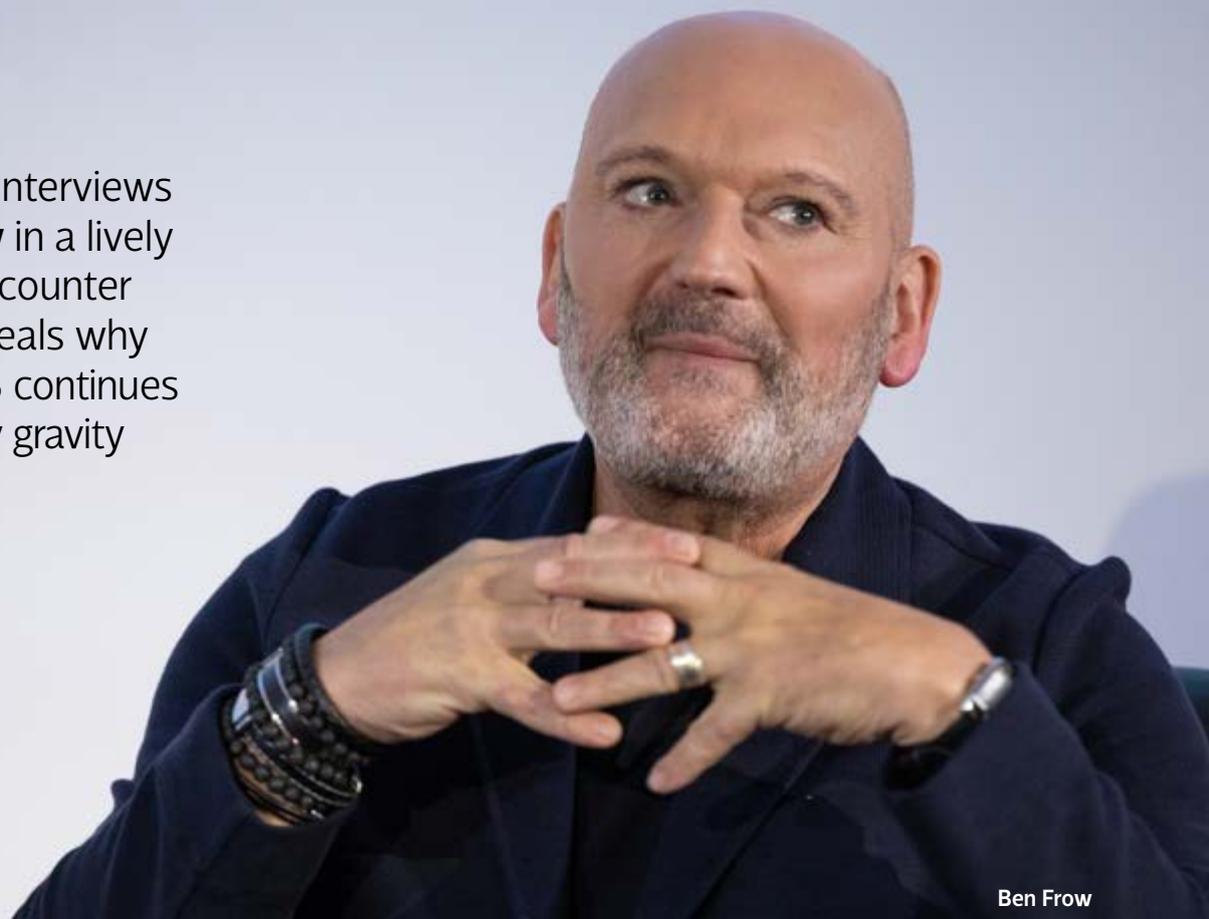
"That was something they very much wanted to take on board with this because the book never goes into detail about the experience of the women who are pregnant."

At the very least, it broadens the themes explored in this provocative story. That, says Farr, is exactly what television is for. "I see television as there to respond to the world we live in," he says. "That's when it's at its best, because we're all watching it and we're all talking to each other about it. It feels to me that this is what society should be about: raising and debating issues and asking questions. Stories are one very wonderful way to do that." ■

The Midwich Cuckoos debuted on Sky Max on 2 June.

Jay Hunt interviews **Ben Frow** in a lively RTS encounter that reveals why Channel 5 continues to defy gravity

Paul Hampartsoumian



Ben Frow

An audience with the outsider

Ben Frow is nothing if not candid. During a high-energy RTS two-way with Jay Hunt, the architect of Channel 5's revival gave an insight into how he's turned around a broadcaster that last year enjoyed its strongest performance since 2009.

"Quite a few of you turned up thinking this would be the channel controllers' version of *Fight Club*," joked Hunt, one of British TV's most successful content supremos, most notably at Channel 4 – she is now creative director, Europe, worldwide video at Apple.

She said the two were not mates but that she had been very impressed by Frow's achievements.

He told her that when he first worked at Channel 5 as controller of features and entertainment, from 2004 to 2007, a lot of work needed doing. "There was a pungent smell about the channel for many years," he said. "I was part of creating that smell and my vision was to get rid of it."

He returned to Channel 5 in 2013 as director of programmes – he is now chief content officer, UK, Paramount, with a range of responsibilities that extend beyond the core channel. He immediately set about modernising an entity once associated with US imports, such as *CSI*, and the long-running Australian soap *Neighbours*, recently axed.

Today, Channel 5 is barely recognisable as the broadcaster it was nearly a

decade earlier. Frow's initial success was based on his uncanny knack for creating factual shows that punched above their weight – in a previous incarnation at Channel 4 his hits included *Property Ladder* and *How Clean Is Your House?* – and signing up big-name presenters such as Jeremy Paxman, Michael Portillo, Jane McDonald, Michael Palin and Jeremy Vine; Dan Walker made his debut reading *5 News* this month, replacing Sian Williams.

More recently, despite his limited budget, Frow has guided Channel 5 through an impressive line-up of drama. "I'm not across the dramas. I don't read the dramas," he said. Successes have included a revival of *All Creatures Great and Small* and the Sally



Cruising with Jane McDonald

Channel 5

Lindsay-starring *Cold Call*. To date, under Frow's leadership, the station has commissioned 60 hours of drama.

In an entertaining and often humorous session, Hunt teased out Frow's approach to creating the widely admired broadcaster whose eclectic line-up embraces *The Hotel Inspector*, signature show *Cruising with Jane McDonald*, *Dogs Behaving (Very) Badly*, *Happy Campers: The Caravan Park* and children's eco series *Go Green with the Grimwades*.

Dressed in trademark black (and sockless), Frow revealed to Hunt that quick decision-making and getting people such as McDonald, Portillo, and Palin (who recently visited Iraq for the broadcaster) had been key to transforming Channel 5.

How did he decide which ideas to greenlight? "You're looking for something that will solve a problem, get you out of a hole. You can only take the risks if you bring in the viewers and if the advertisers are happy and the marketing department is happy," he insisted. "You can't play at television. It's a creative job, it cannot be an indulgent job."

He recalled that during the first lockdown he had felt incredible pressure and responsibility for the business and

**'YOU CANNOT
PLAY AT
TELEVISION. IT'S
A CREATIVE JOB,
IT CANNOT BE AN
INDULGENT JOB'**

his team as the advertising market collapsed overnight.

But, ultimately, what he described as his "pragmatic approach" had left Channel 5 occupying a stronger place. Last year, the broadcaster raised its overall viewing share by 5% – and by a whopping 11% in primetime. For ABC1 viewers, Channel 5 enjoyed its best performance for 15 years, with 7% year-on-year growth for this demographic.

All this was achieved at a time of intense competition from the streamers and his public service rivals.

So, how did he know what would work, pressed Hunt. "I don't know. Is it age? [Frow is 61 in July] I'm not trained in media so it's not something I've learnt. I come from a theatre family

– connecting with an audience..."

Frow remembered how, when he became director of programmes, he gave his commissioning team an ace card that they were allowed to use on a project that he didn't want but which they believed in.

He explained: "I want them [the commissioners] to take me to a place and force me to watch something that I wouldn't necessarily have agreed to. I want to give them the space to argue their case..."

"I know I'm nearly always right. I'm rarely wrong. [But] I want them to prove me wrong... force me to reappraise a subject, a talent, or a genre differently."

Apart from being challenged by his team, how does he keep his creative antenna sharp? "You read the papers, and everyone is talking about how much money they're making from their property. That was how *Property Ladder* was born. *The Yorkshire Vet* just popped into my head. I liked the sound of that. It's got a warm, cosy feeling."

Of *Cruising with Jane McDonald*, he said: "It's a very me show. I was crystal clear about what I wanted to do. I was walking the dog on Clapham Common. >



Cold Call

Channel 5

► Oh, cruising. Jane McDonald [laughter]... We utilise Jane brilliantly. Interestingly, when the first cut came in it was a very different show – very sneery.” Frow ensured that it was re-edited to be warm and cosy.

He continued: “I’m not pretending that our job is to reinvent the wheel. We are not a channel that is supposed to innovate and create new directions and break new ground. That is not my remit. We are a commercial channel that has to make a lot of money. It would be remiss of me to be negligently experimental.

“I see something that works on another channel and think: what is our way of doing it? It could be walking programmes. I think: how are we going to do walking programmes that say something about us?”

“It’s a very pragmatic approach to thinking about ideas. We look at what works, we look at what worked five, 10 years ago and what we could reinvent. Should we bring back entertainment shows? What would our take on property be?”

No less a figure than culture minister Nadine Dorries recently described Channel 5 as “the levelling-up broadcaster”, presumably referring to its

‘WE ARE NOT A CHANNEL THAT IS SUPPOSED TO INNOVATE AND... BREAK NEW GROUND. THAT IS NOT MY REMIT’

non-metropolitan flavour, perhaps personified by Jane McDonald, and its popularity in the regions.

Hunt asked if Channel 5 had unintentionally become the levelling-up broadcaster? Frow replied: “We have a lot of regional voices. We film all over the country and don’t make any programmes in London. A lot of our presenters have regional accents.”

He added: “Nowadays, we’ve all got so much choice. The key point is to try and provide content where people go, ‘I really want to watch that because I enjoy being in that person’s company. Or I love being taken to that surprising place. Or I love the tension that this brings. Or I love the fact that I don’t have to think about what I am going to

watch at 9:00pm because there’s a Channel 5 drama.’

“You cut through all the choices that we have and say: ‘This is a place we will give you what you want and make you feel good and pleased to have spent time with us.’ I try to apply that to every single programme... If we fail, we fail, but we can only fail if we’ve done our very best to make sure the content is good.”

It may be that Frow’s unusual background for a British TV executive helps him to connect with parts of the UK that, say, the BBC can find it hard to relate to. “I am an outsider,” he said. “I was an outsider at my choir school ‘cos I couldn’t really sing that well. At my comprehensive school, I was a gay boy who spoke posh, so I was an outsider there. As a costume-maker, I wasn’t as good as other people. In a way, being an outsider liberates you, it gives me the confidence to sit on these panels and fight my corner.”

What is clear is that, under Frow, Channel 5 appears to ignore some of the things his PSB competitors obsess about. He couldn’t care less about his shows having a global audience – or, come to that, what the streamers are doing. Hit shows tend to start off as local

hits, whether it's *Strictly* or *MasterChef*.

He is not interested in chasing younger viewers. Hunt noted that he'd ended up with an audience that is more diverse in terms of regionality and is skewing older and often upmarket. That's not a bad sweet spot for generating revenue.

Frow responded: "As you get older you stop listening to Radio 1 and start listening to Radio 4.... Look, there are a lot of other channels chasing the

'IT WOULD BE REMISS OF ME TO BE NEGLIGENTLY EXPERIMENTAL'

commissioners is to provide the scheduler with as much ammunition as possible, ammunition that can work for us in many different scenarios – male, female, broad, light, dark...

"My eye is mainly on the four other terrestrial channels. How can we grow our share year on year? I am not interested in week on week. I know that last year on this day we got a 4.7% share."

This year, Channel 5 has so far enjoyed five months of continued



Paul Hampartsoumian

young. We all know that young people are very hard to get. They don't watch television in a conventional way. I could piss a lot of money away trying to chase them."

He needs no reminding that big, successful shows need to appeal to a wide range of viewers, comprising different demographics. Without naming names, he categorised some programmes on the BBC, ITV and Channel 4 as "lazy", "second-rate" and "mediocre".

Including his own channel in this harsh analysis, Frow said he sometimes looked across the schedules and thought, "Is this really the best we can be?" He added that "99 times out of 100, I can tell when they won't work. Viewers aren't stupid and they know when something is mediocre. We need to be brave and anarchic. If we are going to go down, it should be all guns blazing."

Frow's favourite Channel 5 meeting of the week is the regular 5:00pm Tuesday get-together, when all the schedules are published and he and his team forensically analyse them to look for opportunities to place their own shows.

"Channel 4 plays a drama against a BBC drama. Why are they doing that? It's insane.... My job and [that of] the

Jay Hunt interviewing Ben Frow

'WE ALL KNOW THAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE VERY HARD TO GET... I COULD PISS A LOT OF MONEY AWAY TRYING TO CHASE THEM'

growth. Not that he is resting on his laurels – especially with the World Cup coming up in November, he needs to get more in the bank in terms of audience share.

Regarding his decision to defy the sceptics and build a successful drama portfolio, he told the RTS that his approach was identical to his attitude to factual: "We didn't have that much money, so we had to find people who wanted to be creative. A lot of people want to do drama but they're not going to be given the opportunity because it is a bit of a closed shop and it's snooty.

"We had to have drama because it is very popular. I was surprised at how quickly we ramped it up.... We now know what works.

"Like factual, the challenge is that we've got to have some stuff that is surprising. Crime does well, thrillers do well, but we've got to have the pieces that make people go, 'Wow', and take some risks with shows that are so not Channel 5." ■

Report by Steve Clarke. 'In conversation with Ben Frow' was an RTS national event held at the Cavendish Conference Centre in central London on 7 June. The producers were Harriet Otoo and Clare Laycock.



Hazy Pics/Alamy

Mud, mud, glorious mud

The phrase “go big or go home” could have been coined for the Glastonbury Festival. There are two ways to experience the world’s most important music weekender: those with the stamina and luck in the ticket lottery can camp out at Worthy Farm, mud and all; or there’s a viable “home” option, with the BBC, a cuppa and biscuits.

Since the BBC gained the rights to Glasto for its 1997 edition, the capacity of the festival has doubled, but the TV coverage and viewership has increased exponentially. That’s particularly the case since the BBC gained distribution rights in 2010 – it is now beamed to around 100 territories across the globe.

James Hall, a freelance journalist who covers Glastonbury for *The Daily Telegraph*, has been attending since 1992. “That was during the time of Channel 4’s *4 Goes To Glastonbury* and, even then, I was protective of our little secret getting out,” he says.

“Since then, the BBC has been instrumental in taking the festival mainstream. Now, you go on an aeroplane and you can watch a Coldplay set from Glastonbury – it really has turned into something else.”

Viewers have seen Radiohead at the

Glastonbury is back after a three-year absence. **Shilpa Ganatra** finds out how the BBC plans to cover the UK’s biggest music festival

top of their game in 1997, witnessed the legendary headline set from David Bowie in 2000, and watched as Jay-Z redefined the remit of Glastonbury in 2008, as did Beyoncé in 2011. The last Glasto in 2019 saw Kylie’s “Legends” slot reap 3.2 million viewers – the festival’s highest ratings yet – “and higher than for *EastEnders*”, notes Hall.

“It’s a win-win for Glastonbury, the BBC and for the artists,” he suggests. “It allows Glastonbury to attract the best line-ups, especially as the artists’ fees are small compared with other festivals. The fee doesn’t cover the production costs, so the bells and whistles have to be paid for out of the artists’ own budgets – rumour has it that Stormzy’s pyros cost £16,000 a burst. But they’re willing to do this because they know it’s going to be watched by hundreds of thousands of people.

“It works for everyone, except rival festivals, who say it creates a licence-fee subsidised event. Other festivals don’t have that exposure in their toolkit, and have to pay more for their artists.”

Still, after Glastonbury’s pandemic-related absence, it returns this year at the end of this month with Billie Eilish, Paul McCartney and Kendrick Lamar headlining. The corresponding coverage promises to “be bigger in scale and range than ever before”, says the BBC’s director of music, Lorna Clarke.

Alison Howe, executive producer for BBC Studios, adds: “We’ve had the biggest enforced break any of us have ever had. So, there’s a real sense of doing everything we can within our power and our budgets to go as big as we can.”

Ahead of the weekend itself, BBC Two documentary *Glastonbury: 50 Years and Counting* will chart its social and musical history, while another doc will go behind the scenes of Stormzy’s powerful headline performance in 2019.

Once the festival site opens, coverage will run across all four linear channels for the first time (and last time, as BBC Four will soon be online-only), alongside expanded iPlayer coverage. Clara Amfo, Jo Whiley and Lauren Laverne return as core presenters of the TV coverage, this year joined by

Radio 1's Jack Saunders. "His energy levels are immense, which is pretty important at Glastonbury, particularly at 1:00am," says Howe.

This year also sees BBC Studios' Glastonbury HQ move to Cardiff. "We've always worked with some of our colleagues in BBC Studios in Cardiff, because there's lots of people there that know and love Glastonbury, but we've formalised it for this year's event," says Howe.

Technical improvements are only to be expected after a two-year hiatus,

and producers that we discover what it enables us to show. And that will build. That's the trajectory we're on, and we're taking it to the next stage."

Preparations begin for the festival at the start of the year. "We start going down in January, when the cows are all out in the woods," says Taylor. "It transforms into a place where you can put on these massive stage shows with huge lighting operations, huge pyrotechnics and lasers... and those have just grown and grown.

"Over the years, the challenge has

Taylor. "We know things take roughly this length of time and they need to happen in this sort of sequence."

Then it's about dealing with the unexpected ("usually weather-related", says Howe) and changing narratives as the festival progresses. That often calls for large-scale changes with little notice.

It's difficult to think of more intense, demanding conditions in which to create such voluminous multichannel output. But that means Glasto provides world-class training for those up for the challenge. "It relies on people



BBC

and the main change for 2022 is upgrading to ultra-high-definition TV (UHD) for much of the Pyramid Stage coverage. Mostly trialled in sport events, it will be the first time that UHD is used in a major music event, with specific benefits for this audience. "The stage coverage will look glossier as a result and the cameras will allow us to show the night-time audience better," says Peter Taylor, BBC Studios' head of operations.

"In the daytime, you look up the hill [towards] the big stages and you can really see that scale of the 80,000-strong crowd. By the time it's the headline act, they're all standing in the dark, and you lose a bit of that atmosphere. With the cameras that we're using, I think we'll be able to get further and see that crowd.

"We've got this technology and it's clever stuff," he continues. "But it's only when we get it into the hands of the creative people like our directors

'IF COLLEAGUES WANT TO SIT IN THE DRY, THEY CAN GO TO WIMBLEDON'

been to find new ways of shooting it when, ultimately, we're still constrained by where we can put cameras because there are thousands of people there."

The stage crews arrive in earnest on the Tuesday of festival week, divided into three presenting teams, a VT team, and a 25-strong team for each of the five stages that are live-streamed.

When it comes to show time, "Glastonbury is a site like no other, because if you try and plan something down to the second, you will fall over", says

volunteering to do it. If you're not a person that enjoys being at Glastonbury, Glastonbury is not the place for you to be," says Taylor. "With all due respect to other colleagues, if they want to go and sit in the dry, they can go to Wimbledon that summer."

"It can be a gruelling place, there's no question," agrees Howe. "But equally, I have been inundated with people who, though they've got lots of other jobs, have already earmarked days off in case there might be a job for them at Glastonbury.

"At the end of it you're exhausted, but you feel like you've just done a year's work. And, as professionals, a lot of people love that.

"Whether you're a runner and it's the maddest thing you've ever done, or you've done as many as I have, it's still a shared unique experience." ■

Glastonbury 2022 runs from 22 to 26 June.



BBC

The Outlaws

Crime and community payback

As *The Outlaws* returns to BBC One, the RTS in Bristol hears the creators' formula for mixing comedy and drama

The eagerly awaited second series of Stephen Merchant's comedy thriller *The Outlaws* received its premiere in Bristol in front of a sell-out, home-town audience, ahead of its return to BBC One on 5 June.

The first episode of a series that follows the lives of seven minor felons completing a Community Payback sentence marked a hugely confident return, delivering big laughs and jeopardy as the characters try to escape the clutches of a violent drug lord.

Comedy thrillers are a tricky proposition: the risk is that they are neither comic nor thrilling. That is something *The Outlaws* avoids by being very good at both, often at the same time.

The series was created by Merchant and US film-maker Elgin James, best known for the Amazon Prime crime series *Mayans MC*. "He's renowned for tough, gritty drama," said Merchant. "Elgin himself ran with gangs when he was growing up, and did some prison time. He always jokes about the fact that he and I together are an unlikely mix.

"This is going to be hard to believe but I've been in very few street gangs and spent very little time in prison."

Despite the obvious differences in

background, Merchant said he and Elgin shared similar interests. "He told me that, when he was in a gang, he liked to read, but he didn't want the other gang members to know he liked reading books, so he'd hide [them].... This is a tough gang member reading *Pride and Prejudice*. So, it seemed to us completely believable that you could have humour and then moments of great tension. That was what life was."

Executive producer Luke Alkin from Big Talk Productions took Merchant's idea to the BBC's comedy department, which instantly greenlit the show: "It wasn't just the brilliance of the scripts but also the timing – the distinctions between comedy commissioning and drama commissioning were breaking down."

He added that Big Talk's early successes, such as *Shaun of the Dead* and

Hot Fuzz, were also known for “melding genres, particularly with comedy. It’s part of the heritage of our company.”

Merchant wears many hats on *The Outlaws*: co-creator, writer, actor (he plays lonely lawyer Greg), executive producer and even director of episodes in series 1. “As an actor, you see it from a different perspective... from the inside out... whereas, as a writer or director, you’re on the outside looking in. I have great faith in the actors telling us when something feels phoney.

“I hope the actors would say that I’m not precious about the dialogue and if they’ve got an improvement, an improvisation or a note on it, then I’m happy to welcome that.”

“I feel very free to have a bit of

pandemic. “It was a mad idea and very exhausting but we managed to stagger through.... It helped us in a way because we were like a team in the trenches fighting through and everyone getting to know each other.”

“It feels like a proper love letter to the city,” said MacDonald. Gunning added: “I think Bristol’s the ninth main character in the show – it looks so great on screen and I’m so pleased the world’s getting to see it in all its glory.”

Alkin added: “It’s a strange thing but contemporary Bristol hasn’t been seen that much on screen, because it’s got a unique atmosphere and culture, and it looks great.”

Both Merchant and Cole are Bristol natives. The latter recalled: “I’ve got so

exactly like San Francisco. And the good thing was, because we’re in the pandemic, as Gamba says, we couldn’t go out and show him that it wasn’t.

“We seemed to hit it off and he came to Bristol.... It was nerve-racking because we were filming in a pandemic and he’s 78 years old, so you’re always a little bit jumpy... but we managed to get through it without him dying, so it was the best outcome, really.”

Hollywood legend Walken, surely the definition of a cult actor, plays small-time crook Frank, and is a huge catch for the series. “We always wanted a character who felt like he’d fallen to Earth and landed in Bristol,” added Merchant.

Will there be another outing for *The Outlaws*? “We have ideas for a third



Stephen Merchant in *The Outlaws*

BBC

improv here and there,” said Jessica Gunning who plays Diane, the deluded community project supervisor. “The original scripts are a great foundation – I thought they were brilliant.”

“It was a real joy – the actors were amazing and you could rely on them to get the tone right. I had the time of my life,” added Alicia MacDonald who directed episodes 3 to 6.

Gamba Cole plays Christian, whose relationship with Rani (Rhianne Barreto) develops in series 2. He said: “I’ve worked with [Rhianne] before [on US drama *Hanna*] so we already had that trust.... We’ve got a great friendship.”

Series 1 and 2 of *The Outlaws* were shot back-to-back in Bristol to make up for time lost during the Covid-19

much family here... and it was nice to be in the same city as them – but I couldn’t see them because we were in the pandemic. It was bittersweet: you’re doing what you love and you want to share that with the people you love, but you can’t see them.”

Referencing the latest Downing Street partygate revelations, Merchant interrupted, to huge cheers from the audience: “You didn’t go and have a drink, perhaps at a leaving do?”

Merchant recalled flying to Connecticut to entice Christopher Walken, who won an Oscar for *The Deer Hunter*, on to the show. “He asked me what Bristol was like. I said it was very hilly, colourful, has a big suspension bridge, it’s on the water, it’s artsy and bohemian, so it’s

series, but if I say it’s definitely happening and it doesn’t then I’ll have embarrassed myself... but hopefully it will.

“Originally, the thought was that you could have a different set of offenders in different cities... but, not only have we enjoyed filming in Bristol, we’ve fallen in love with the characters.... So, if we can bring them back, we will.” ■

Report by Matthew Bell. ‘The Outlaws series 2 screening and Q&A’ was an RTS West of England event held at the Watershed Cinema in Bristol on 24 May. It was hosted by the writer Chinonyerem Odimba Odimba. Suzy Lambert produced the event with the assistance of Big Talk Productions, Four Eyes and Rich Cain of Ian Johnson Publicity.

PSB on the rack

Across Europe public service TV faces multiple challenges, explains **Claire Enders**

There is a sea change afoot across European public service broadcasting (PSB). Alongside the ongoing tumult that surrounds the future of the BBC and Channel 4, several continental European PSBs have recently undergone significant reforms to their funding models. All this comes at a time when they face an intensifying battle for eyeballs and production resources with predominantly US-based streaming giants.

There is significant variation in the market conditions, public perceptions and financial health of PSBs, but there is commonality in terms of the audience and revenue challenges they face. Across the countries of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), between 2015 and 2020, the total weekly reach of the PSBs dropped by 5 percentage points to 61%; for 15-24s, it dropped by 10 points to only 35%.

A worrying aspect of some of these reforms is that they contribute to the erosion of impartial news and current affairs, provision of which has enabled electors to be informed and make their choices at the polls independently. Hungary is an outstanding example of how the decline of this vital institutional foundation can undermine a well-functioning democracy.

Between 2009 and 2022, 11 EBU territories dropped the licence fee. This



France Télévisions

Backs to the wall:
France Télévisions
co-production *Germinal*

leaves 24 out of 56 EBU countries using a licence fee to fund at least part of their PSB systems, with many methods employed for collecting the fee. The most widespread is via electricity suppliers (12 countries) and the PSBs themselves (seven countries). Other methods include using the tax authorities (France and Israel), postal services (the Irish Republic), and private companies (Switzerland and the UK).

The future of the licence-fee model is at stake in many territories, including France; the UK will launch a review of alternative funding models for the BBC in July. Ireland is also potentially in line to follow suit later this decade.

The three main reform options we have seen play out in the market are: changing the fee into a household charge (Germany); replacing it with a special, ringfenced fund outside the

state budget financed by a hypothecated PSB tax (Finland and Sweden); or replacing it with direct funding from the state budget (North Macedonia, Norway and Romania).

One important outlier is Switzerland: the “No Billag” referendum in 2018 proposed the abolition of direct and indirect public funding for the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG SSR). The motion was overwhelmingly rejected by 72% of voters. This was a significant endorsement of the fundamental purpose of PSB stress-tested in the public arena.

The reasons for recent changes are varied. Denmark’s shift was motivated by opposition to the level of the fee and the advantage it was seen to afford PSBs. In Sweden, it was driven by fears surrounding the fee’s outdated terms and its inefficient collection (evasion hovered between 11% and 15%). The



A strong public campaign supported Switzerland's public service broadcaster in a vote in 2018 on whether to defund it

Dietrich Karl Mäurer

deference towards politicians. FTV may already be under the Government's thumb. Close to 15% of its revenue is a discretionary budget allocation from the state. This is hardly an argument for even more discretion.

More worryingly, FTV is in a weak position to defend the licence fee because it has failed to build public support for it. Echoing British political rhetoric, the anti-licence-fee right says FTV lacks pluralism, while the left deplors what it sees as populism.

Annual budget reviews also risk undermining ambitious drama projects, such as 2021's Zola adaptation, *Germinal*, which are easier to cut than the massive in-house wage bill.

Traditionally, the French government has been preoccupied by supporting domestic production and has taken the lead in Europe in promoting regulation to force international SVoD platforms such as Netflix to invest in European content.

However, the Government has revealed its policy blind spot: its conception of an audio-visual industry modulated exclusively via regulation overlooks the crucial institutional role of broadcasters in steering quality projects. From HBO to the BBC, via RAI or ARD, experience shows that high-quality production cannot emerge without demanding commissioners.

What does this change mean for Europe? There are layers of threat to consider. Before even considering the sufficiency of PSB funding mechanisms, the transition from linear to digital and on-demand has shown the potential to unravel national television ecosystems. The global tech giants' control of interfaces and content discovery paths is pushing European providers down the supply chain. Only consolidated commercial broadcasters have sufficient scale to steer national markets towards digital models. Only then can European content providers retain prominence and their ability to set the popular cultural agenda.

We have already seen mergers in France (TF1 and M6), the Netherlands (RTL4 and Talpa) and Belgium (RTL and VTM). The PSBs may well be caught in this consolidatory slipstream (this may be the outcome of Channel 4's privatisation). All this points to declining pluralism, and, probably, independence and competition. ■

Claire Enders is the founder of Enders Analysis.

new Swedish fee is charged to individuals, not households, proportional to income and capped.

Where there is a low willingness to pay for the licence fee, these conditions have sometimes led to a rethink of the licence by reforming or remodelling its scope. In Germany in 2013, the licence fee was changed from one linked to devices to a household levy. In Italy, in 2016, the fee was added to utility bills to prevent widespread evasion. This was challenged by the European Commission and the Italian Government is looking for an alternative.

Compare all this with the BBC's position: evasion is low, indicating that the collection method is appropriate; and the licence fee is good value compared with other paid-for UK alternatives and Western European equivalents. To date, there are no PSBs that have adopted a subscription model or a paywall, as these are incompatible with universality.

France provides the most pertinent and analogous situation to the challenges facing the BBC and Channel 4. As part of his successful campaign for re-election, President Macron promised to scrap the licence fee.

This policy was poached from his leading centre-right rival, Valérie Pécresse, and justified by the squeeze on French households at a time of rising living costs. Although no specific replacement for the licence fee was proposed, Macron's allies have indicated that future funding will come from the state, under a multi-year programme.

France's licence fee, charged to TV-set owners, is relatively low, at €138 per year, as against €191 in the UK. Many households are exempt: only

22.9 million pay the fee out of a total of 27.6 million TV homes. The largest exempt group are low-income households with one member aged over 60.

The state pays France Télévisions (FTV) an annual contribution to offset these exemptions. Overall, in 2022 the licence fee is expected to generate €3.14bn in revenues for FTV alongside €561m in state contributions. By comparison, the BBC's licence-fee revenue for 2021 was €4.5bn.

FTV also carries advertising in the daytime, which generated €352m in 2019; the broadcaster's finances have yet to recover from the decision taken to halt advertising in 2008 by President Nicolas Sarkozy, and only partially carried out.

How would tying funding to the state alter FTV? Without explicitly opposing the president's plans, FTV's CEO, Delphine Ernotte Cunci, has pointed out that "predictable and consistent" resources are necessary to the broadcaster's independence. In other words, the broadcaster needs to pursue a long-term investment strategy, and, crucially, to be shielded from partisan pressure on news and current affairs. An organisation obliged to plead for funds from the government will find itself in a weak position when it comes to resisting editorial interference – a key issue in a country where all other major media are owned by commercial interests.

This is compounded if the settlement is only for one year, with no certainty of income beyond that point. The risk is elevated in a country with a history of government pressure on media and a journalistic culture of

Prime-time lesbian hero



BBC

Gentleman Jack

‘**W**hen you write a show, you hope you’ll get good viewing figures, you hope people will like it. But the global response that we’ve had, this huge emotional response – you don’t expect that when you write telly.’

This was the visibly moved writer of *Gentleman Jack*, Sally Wainwright, interviewed for a sensitive and poignant new observational documentary, *Gentleman Jack Changed My Life*, made by Leeds-based Screenhouse Productions.

The historical drama chronicles the life and loves of West Yorkshire’s Anne Lister: 19th-century landowner, industrialist, traveller, diarist and, crucially, self-confident lesbian.

Lister had been unknown outside her native Halifax, and her love life a secret, until the 1980s, when local historian Helena Whitbread set to work on Lister’s journals – “something like 7,700 pages and around 5 million words”.

Wainwright says of her show: “It’s the first time I’ve written something that I

The RTS learns how BBC One’s *Gentleman Jack* gave women the confidence to come out to themselves and their families

think was important. Actually important.” And just how important to the lives of women of all ages, and how Lister has inspired those women, is what *Gentleman Jack Changed My Life*, narrated by Miriam Margolyes, sets out to explore.

Following an RTS preview screening last month, producer-director and former RTS Yorkshire Chair Fiona Thompson – joking how nice it was “for once, not to be the token lesbian in the room” – asked executive producer and co-owner of Screenhouse, Barbara Govan, how she got the idea.

Govan described her reaction to watching the first series of *Gentleman Jack*: “I thought, ‘Wow! This is amazing. Here’s a lesbian hero on BBC One at

9:00pm on a Sunday’. Then, the other side of that was, ‘Why are we seeing a lesbian hero on BBC One at 9:00pm on a Sunday only now, in 2019?’”

This led Govan to wonder how many people had heard of Anne Lister, and whether viewers had simply “looked at the listings, seen a period drama, [thought], ‘Ooh, it’s got Suranne Jones in it’ and then... been taken completely by surprise”. Had watching *Gentleman Jack* made “a lot of women out there realise something? Had it enabled their conversations?”

Employing an all-female crew was a no-brainer. Then, she quickly realised, “These women [who would feature in the documentary] are going to be talking about maybe discovering that they’re lesbians for the first time. They need to talk to lesbians about that, otherwise how will they feel safe?”

First on board was producer Al Johnstone, whose job it was to find the contributors. “Because there was such an amazing pre-existing online community, which had sprung up around the series, it made sense to start there,” said Johnstone. According to

film-maker/producer/director Sara Hardy, by the time she herself joined the team, Johnstone had “already done much of the legwork”. Hardy “met and interviewed what felt like hundreds of people internationally via Zoom”.

Women from all over, from the US to Brazil and Israel to India, spoke to her about how the drama had made them feel valued, and how their loves, as well as their fears – of being beaten up or worse – had been validated by watching role model Anne Lister on screen.

But how had Johnstone and Hardy persuaded the women in the film to tell their stories so openly? “It’s a tricky thing,” Hardy conceded. “People have to be ready to tell their story.” Some people agreed to tell their stories just for research, but “others said, ‘Yes, I can tell you my story, and this is what’s happening to me now, in the next few weeks and months.’ We spent a lot of time chatting to those people... and it was a challenge.”

Thompson agreed: “It’s very brave to go in front of camera... and bring [their] families into it as well,” she said. She turned to one of the film’s contributors, Sami, a mixed-heritage barrister, “who has pushed through barriers, pushed through the glass ceiling. But when you’re with your mother... we see this wonderful relationship that has obviously had its testing times as well.”

Sami had come out to her mum, Hazel, 12 years ago, with devastating results for them both. However, Sami told Thompson, “We watched the first series [of *Gentleman Jack*] together, I think that’s why it’s so important... it opened up a dialogue, the big elephant in the room... And just from those initial Zoom meetings [with Johnstone and Hardy]... the level at which [my mum and I] were talking was improving, and it was working for us. How you see us today is a work in progress, and that was the start of that work that needed to be done.”

Sami hoped that when the documentary was screened abroad that it would help women in other, more repressive cultures, too.

For Mormon Yvonne, realising she was gay while watching *Gentleman Jack* was “a bomb falling on top of me”. She chose to come out to her adult children in the film, but this was potentially a

double risk as her daughter was also an active member of a church that forbids same-sex relationships.

Thompson asked her how the documentary had impacted her, apropos her own faith. “That was the moment that *Gentleman Jack* and everything hit me,” Yvonne said. “Because, when [Anne Lister] said, ‘I am made as God

She continued: “As it happened, she blurted it out as soon as she got her foot in the door... and afterwards she said that she’d felt really emboldened just by being in a room where she was part of a group outnumbering the straight people.”

Hardy admitted that Chichi’s experience had made her feel emotional, and



Sami in *Gentleman Jack Changed My Life*

BBC

intended me to be’... I thought, ‘That is so true.’ Then I thought: ‘Oh my God – that’s me!’ And it made me not see it as something wrong, it was actually how I was made. So that statement meant everything to me.”

Yvonne has distanced herself from the church but, when she comes out to her children, she finds great allies in both. “Because of the way this team was with me, I trusted them with something that was so private. [People might say] ‘it’s exploitative’ but this is the most comfortable I’ve felt... in my life.”

When Thompson opened the discussion out to questions from the floor, one audience member asked about another contributor to the documentary, Chichi, who Hardy films coming out to her grandparents – what if it hadn’t gone as well as it did?

“We had a big conversation with Chichi,” Hardy replied, “and said... that if she got there... and decided that it wasn’t the right thing to say, we’d just film her chatting to them and leave and they’d be none the wiser.... And if that had been the case, it would still have been really important to show.”

Thompson asked her and Johnstone how the process of making the documentary had been for them as workers “in an industry where sometimes we [lesbians] can be quite invisible”.

Johnstone said she had made documentaries on a range of subjects but this was the first time she had made a film like this: “Making this documentary has been amazing for me. I feel that my identity has been really reinforced. It has really helped me... it has worked both ways.”

Thompson was possibly only half-joking when she said: “It’s almost like *Gentleman Jack Changed My Life Changed My Life* is worth [Screenhouse] making next!” ■

Report by Carole Solazzo. ‘Gentleman Jack Changed My Life: Screening and panel talk’ was an RTS national event held at Archive, Leeds, on 26 May. It was produced by RTS Yorkshire Chair Lisa Holdsworth and event co-ordinator and administrator Jane Hall in association with the Women in Film and Television Awards and regional events producer Scarlet Brearley.

A Timelord making history

Caroline Frost profiles *Sex Education* star **Ncuti Gatwa**, who was recently given the keys to the Tardis

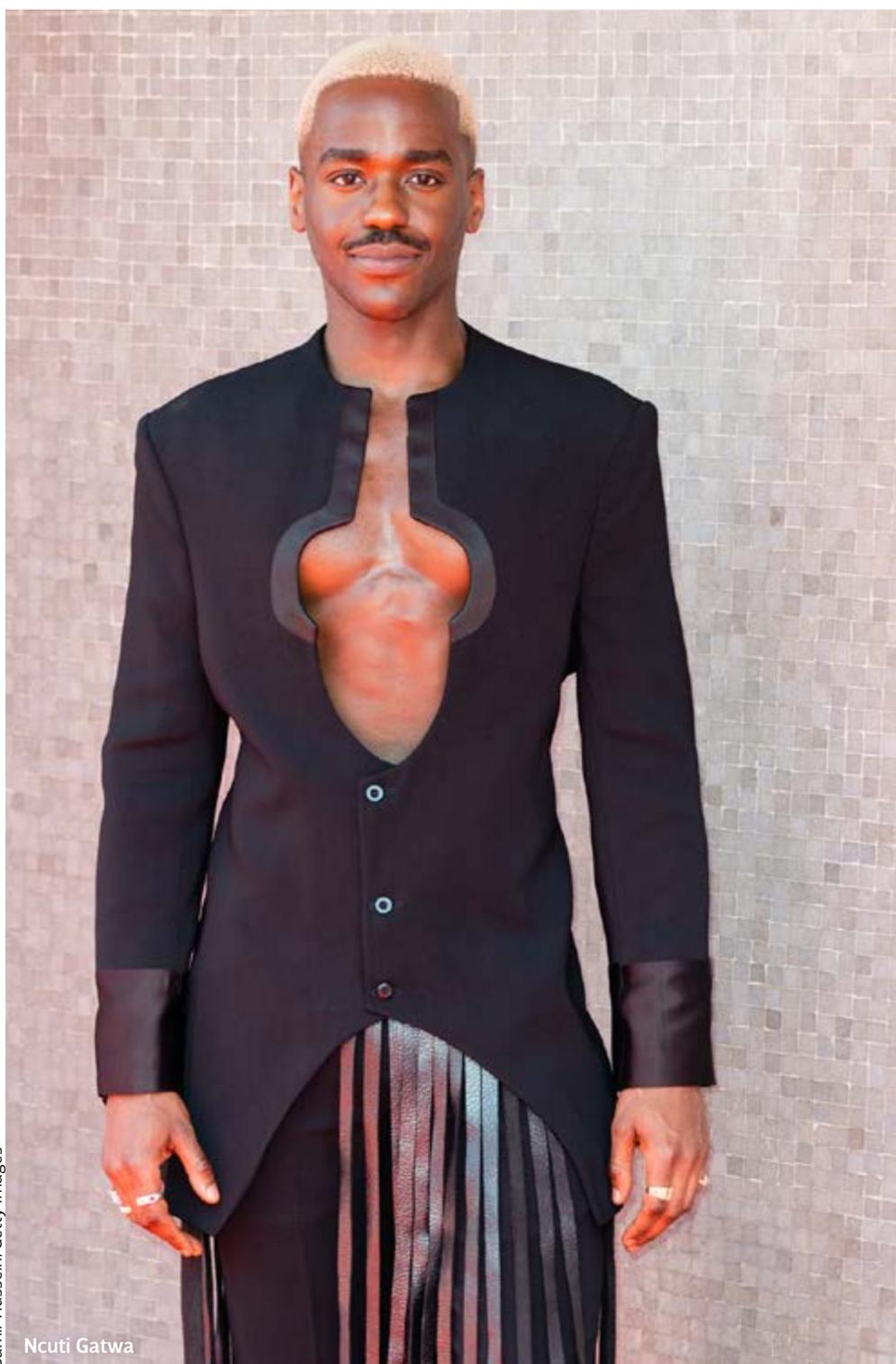
When the Bafta TV Awards took place in London at the beginning of May, amid the sea of famous faces on the Southbank's red carpet, all eyes were on one young man – Ncuti Gatwa, announced a few hours earlier as the new Doctor in *Doctor Who*.

If this could be considered a little intimidating for any actor, Gatwa showed no sign of nerves. And anyway, he could bask in the enthusiasm and support of the man beside him, Russell T Davies, considered by fans to be the official Tardis-whisperer of the long-running show and clearly thrilled by his new recruit to the blue police box.

“We love him, don't we?” was how Davies responded to the inevitable question of what prompted him to cast Gatwa. “It was a blazing audition. Our very last audition. We thought we had someone, and then he came and stole it. I'm properly thrilled.”

Gatwa described the relief of knowing he no longer had to keep to himself the big secret he's known since February: “It's been emotional. I woke up crying and then I started dancing, but I'm glad it's finally out. It's been tricky keeping this under wraps as I have a very big mouth.”

Bafta's red carpet is 6,600km away from the Rwandan capital of Kigali where Gatwa was born in 1992, the son of Tharcisse Gatwa, a journalist with a PhD in theology, and Josephine, an admin clerk. Two years later, the family fled the country's genocidal war and settled in Scotland, moving



Samir Hussein/Getty Images

Ncuti Gatwa

between Edinburgh and Dunfermline. Gatwa has since revealed that, as a child, he experienced racial bullying. He told the BBC Scotland documentary *Black and Scottish*: “I definitely felt, growing up, that I wasn’t seen as the same as anyone around me because no one around me looked like me. I remember my mum being like, ‘Everyone looks the same’. She travelled all around Edinburgh trying to find someone who was black, and she couldn’t see anyone.

“Role models? There were no black Scottish role models. I felt like I was the only black person in the world.”

Unbowed, Gatwa studied for a degree in acting at Glasgow’s Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, graduating in 2013. This training nurtured his love of theatre and much of his earliest work found him on stage across the UK, including at Dundee Rep, and in London, at the Yard, the Noel Coward Theatre and Shakespeare’s Globe.

His very first TV appearance took him back to Scotland, with a tiny role in the BBC Four sitcom *Bob Servant* (2014) – buying a burger from a pre-*Succession* Brian Cox. This was followed by an appearance in an adaptation of Iain Banks’s *Stonemouth* (2015) and a production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (2016). *Bob Servant* writer Neil Forsyth recalls a young Gatwa: “Ncuti was only on set one day, but I remember him well as a bright presence on a gloomy day of filming in rainy Broughty Ferry. He had one line, ‘What was in that burger?’. There is no doubt that *Bob Servant* would take full credit for launching Ncuti’s career and would now be looking to be installed into a management role.”

Seemingly on his way in the industry, Gatwa moved to London, aged 21, but a dip in his fortunes found him sofa-surfing between friends, borrowing money for Tube fares to auditions and struggling mentally. He described the pressure of not wanting to let down his parents and other loved ones.

In 2020, he wrote of this time in an article for *The Big Issue*: “It felt awful being that guy – using the electric and water but not contributing. I developed depression. But I never let people know how down I was feeling. That would have been another burden for my friends to take on.”

Things changed when he won the role of Eric Effiong in Netflix’s *Sex Education*, the zeitgeist-surfing teen sex comedy watched by 40 million viewers within the first four weeks of its release in 2019, and almost instantly recommissioned for a second series. It remains a show for the moment – a comedy that pays nostalgic homage to the ever-popular screen staple of teens going into battle with their hormones, while bringing it bang up to date



Gatwa as Eric in *Sex Education*

Netflix

thanks to its serious discussions about sexual politics and contemporary attitudes towards relationships.

The three central youngsters are Otis (Asa Butterfield), his love interest, Maeve (Emma Mackey), and his best friend, Eric, played by Gatwa. From the off, he was applauded for his portrayal of a black, gay, Christian teen, and won the Comedy Performance (Male) category at the 2020 RTS Programme Awards.

Creator Laurie Nunn previously told *Television* that two writers contributed to his storyline because of Eric’s “intersectionality – I’m a white female, I wouldn’t presume to know what he was going through. Eric was the only character written so specifically”.

Gatwa reflected in an interview for his alma mater, the Royal Conservatoire: “Eric has so much love to give but it isn’t always reciprocated. He’s openly gay but comes from a very strict, religious family background. His parents are African. He resonates with so many people because of all the sections of society he represents. When you have a character who is bringing those things together, it is a lot of pressure, but it’s so beautiful.”

Three seasons later, Gatwa has scooped up Scottish Bafta and Rose d’Or awards plus an Instagram following of 2.7 million and counting... and now the keys to the Tardis (metaphorically, before Whovians get cross).

When Russell T Davies was previously revealed to be returning to the helm of the show he rejuvenated back in 2005, many were convinced he would bring with him one of his young *It’s a Sin* cast – perhaps Omari Douglas or Olly Alexander.

Instead, he’s gone for someone who can match them both for telegenic charisma, has an established fan base and, many are convinced, the power to bring a special magic dust all of his own.

Science fiction writer Tade Thompson told *The Guardian*, “Casting Ncuti Gatwa is an inspired choice. He can pull off the mercurial madcap nature required. He has the energy and the physicality, and he brings youth to the role. Plus, he will be coming with young fans already. I’m happy to stick my neck out and say that he will go down as many people’s favourite Doctor for a long time to come.

“Maybe having a black Doctor will open up new storylines, although, when it comes to science fiction, we’ve never been limited by anything [other than] the writer’s imagination.”

As for Gatwa himself, despite all the new attention, even before he appears in the upcoming *Barbie* movie alongside Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling, it’s clear he hasn’t forgotten his roots and is determined to make a difference in his birth nation. He recently said of his blossoming reputation, “I want to build a school in Rwanda. There are so many amazing fresh young minds in Africa that need nourishment from outside.”

When he makes his *Doctor Who* debut next year, Gatwa will be the 14th Doctor, the fourth Scot in the role, and the first black actor to be cast as the series lead.

But he shows no sign of being intimidated by the part’s history when he says: “I’m definitely going to do my own thing. This role is an honour, it’s an institution and means a lot to so many people, including myself.

“It makes everyone feel seen, something everyone can enjoy. I feel very grateful having the baton handed over and I’m going to try and do my best.” ■



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OUR FRIEND IN THE NORTH WEST

Cat Lewis hails an innovative training scheme helping to future-proof the TV sector and address the skills gap

The £6bn post-pandemic boom in TV and film production is welcome news amid the uncertainty caused by the freeze to the BBC licence fee and the planned privatisation of Channel 4.

The global expansion of content platforms and the UK's fantastic reputation as a country that delivers excellent programmes means that there is more TV and film being made here than ever before. But there is a problem: we are predicted to have a shortfall of 40,000 creative-sector workers by 2025.

Production outside London has taken off since Ofcom tightened its criteria on how programmes made outside London must be made. Those of us running independents in the nations and regions are already struggling to recruit staff.

The industry is responding with a huge number of training schemes. In Birmingham, the BBC is taking on more apprentices than ever before. It is partnering with production companies to ensure these new recruits gain experience on a wide variety of shows.

For independents, such as Nine Lives, with a new base in Birmingham as well as our HQ in Manchester, it's a hugely beneficial way to take on a new starter. You know the training they'll receive from the BBC will be second to none. In fact, meeting the wonderful people running the apprentice scheme made me wish I was starting out again myself!

ScreenSkills also offers a great range of training, including a new fund that Andrew Chowns, the former CEO of Directors UK, and I first



Nine Lives Media

suggested a few years ago. At the time, he was Chair of the TV Skills Panel and I was Vice-Chair.

Aware that the BBC and Channel 4 were at the time the principal funders of most of ScreenSkills' training in unscripted content, we came up with the idea of creating a new cross-industry pot of money. This would be raised by charging a very small percentage on the budget of every non-scripted programme commissioned.

It took years to get this idea off the ground but now the Unscripted TV Skills Fund is future-proofing the industry by addressing the skills shortages in factual and features TV across the UK. The main aim is to build a bigger and more inclusive pool of off-screen talent in the nations and regions.

Unscripted UK productions contribute 0.25% of the agreed price of the

commission, split equally between the broadcaster (or SVoD) and the production company, up to an agreed cap. This means that for every £1,000 spent the broadcaster and the production company each pay £1.25 into the new training pot. The broadcaster/SVoD collects the fund contribution for the production company, as they do with the fees for Directors UK.

The exact training offered is decided by industry professionals: ScreenSkills has a council, steering group and working groups that decide which courses to fund. The key skills shortages the fund is currently aiming to address are in production management, development, self-shooting and post-production. Also, freelancers working in all genres of unscripted TV can benefit from a rolling programme of short courses, mostly on Zoom.

It's worth checking these out on the ScreenSkills website. The training available covers a wide range – from basic budgeting to camera skills, and from how best to work with vulnerable contributors to managing difficult people.

ScreenSkills also offers short retraining programmes to people from other industries to get them job-ready so independents can take them on in roles such as production co-ordinators – who are in short supply.

Few of us will notice such small sums disappearing from our budgets but having a large new fund for training courses is already benefiting the TV industry and ensuring many more young people can be paid to do what they love – as we all are!

Cat Lewis is the founder and CEO of Nine Lives Media.



Sustainable TV – myth or reality?

The rocketing cost of energy will reinforce the drive to ensure that programme-making is sustainable and that the TV industry hits its target to have net zero carbon emissions by 2030. That was one of the takeaways from a recent RTS event, “Sustainable TV studio production – myth or reality?”, which was held over Zoom to reduce its carbon footprint.

The panel pondered everything from recycling and working with cardboard sets to reducing travel and helping suppliers to go green.

“There’s never been a better reason to try and reduce carbon, because carbon has a price attached to it,” said Steve Smith, an award-winning TV director and executive producer at environmental production house Picture Zero. Its output champions

The RTS hears how initiatives such as Sky Studios Elstree are helping to green TV and film-making

climate-change action and Smith is a Bafta Albert ambassador and environmental production consultant.

He continued: “We’ve got our energy crisis, which we talk about from a domestic perspective, but the cost of energy is going to have an inflationary impact on our industry. The likelihood is that, over the next few months, some studio power charges are going to triple. If we can find ways of saving energy, then that’s going to help reduce budgets as well.”

Smith is also a non-executive director

at Elstree Film Studios. He explained that Elstree had recently opened two new sound stages incorporating roof-mounted solar panels to capture and store energy. This should lead to cost savings within a year. Elstree is also replacing gas boilers, retrofitting double glazing and putting in thermostats and renewable energy sources to ensure it is in line with 21st-century, eco-friendly ambitions.

Phil Holdgate, head of production sustainability at ITV Studios, said that the energy cost crisis was an opportunity to invest in on-site renewables: “Generating your own electricity has become really appealing and the pay-back period is also a lot shorter [than in previous years]. We might see some accelerated progress amid a pretty dire situation with the energy market.”

Sky Studios chief operating officer Caroline Cooper was gearing up for the

opening of Sky Studios Elstree. Sky's state-of-the-art film and TV studio goes live in the coming weeks. It will house 13 sound stages, ranging from 930m² to 2,800m². Sky hopes the studio will enable £3bn-worth of new production investment over the first five years.

The development is being trumpeted as the world's most sustainable studio facility. Sky Originals will be made there, as will movies from Universal Pictures, Focus Features and Working Title, plus TV series from Universal Studio Group and third-party producers.

"There's no getting away from it, studios use a lot of power," said Cooper. "We made sure we got about

and a scorecard of key performance indicators. Each studio will then receive a bespoke report on how it has been performing and be benchmarked against other participating studios.

"They'll be able to see how they're performing across six key areas – climate, circularity, nature, people, management and data," said Whitehead. "We're hoping that it's going to drive best practice within studios."

With paperless productions, digital call sheets, hydrogen-fuelled generators and reusable, heavy-duty, cardboard-built sets that can be moved quickly, studio production is innovating with sustainability in mind.

In the quest for sustainability, the panellists hailed the use of virtual

run from "full-fat *Mandalorian* creations" to using it to run through stunt sequences in advance so that fewer mistakes were made when shooting. Much of the outlay for such costly equipment falls on the studio facilities. "I don't think we could come up with a commercial model that would have supported [all] the investments we've made in making that studio as green as possible," she said. "We didn't look at it through that lens. It would have cost less to build a studio in a slightly different way but that, for us, was never an option."

Much of the TV sector's carbon emissions come from the supply chain. "For Sky and for the BBC to achieve their net zero ambitions, all of us who



5km-worth of PVs on the roof." (PVs, or photovoltaics, generate electric power by using solar cells to convert energy from the sun and can be used to power equipment or to recharge batteries.)

Cooper hoped that about 40% of onsite power would be generated by these panels, while the rest of the energy supply would come from renewable sources. "Things such as LED lighting, rainwater harvesting and [shunning] diesel generators are all part of the plans," she said.

Albert, the industry-wide sustainability initiative, has many incentives in place to help drive green practices across TV, including production crew training and certification systems.

From this October, Albert will produce the first in what is planned to become an annual report, benchmarking studios against the studio sustainability standard, a voluntary standard for studio facilities.

Albert special projects manager Michelle Whitehead told the RTS that the report would not be a league table of goodies and baddies: "It's definitely a carrot and not a stick."

The plan is for studios to submit data

studios as a game-changer. The bulk of a production's carbon footprint is down to location shoots and transporting the cast and crew there and back.

Holdgate highlighted an ITV Studios case study where the production avoided filming overseas. Instead, it was shot virtually: "It worked out in excess of 90% less emissions compared with how it would have been if we had flown the crew out."

The panel agreed that there did not need be any compromise on the visual quality of a show filmed in a virtual studio. Smith recalled that, when he started out at the BBC's Television Centre in the 1980s, filming the iconic drama *I, Claudius*, sets were built like those found in theatres. "Now, we've got this technology that can make it seem so realistic, we don't have to have those hammy, theatrical painted backdrops any more," he observed.

Holdgate said there was no waste and few materials involved with virtual set filming – but he did acknowledge the vast amount of power required to create virtual worlds. Renewables and green tariffs could help to mitigate that.

Cooper said virtual studio use could

create content and work with broadcasters are going to have to do our bit," said Smith.

He added: "Our industry also has another, bigger, role to play, which is how we can inspire through content. We talk about carbon footprints a lot, but what's the carbon brain print?" In other words, what can we all do to reduce carbon emissions in our daily lives?

With Sky, the BBC and ITV all passionate about sustainability, the panellists agreed that it was important to help audiences understand what the transition to a sustainable future would look like. Shows such as the Picture Zero-produced documentary *The People vs Climate Change*, shown by the BBC, and the five-part series of animated shorts *So Hot Right Now* were helping to educate audiences. "A sustainable future is everyone's responsibility," concluded Holdgate. ■

Report by Stuart Kemp. 'Sustainable TV studio production – myth or reality?' was an RTS event held on 26 May. It was hosted by Alex Farber, deputy editor of Broadcast, and produced by Victoria Fairclough.

The serious world of podcasting



Channel 4

Ways to Change the World: Krishnan Guru-Murthy talking to Jameela Jamil

Podcasts are not all about comedy, true crime and self-help – increasingly, news and current affairs are fuelling the boom in the audio format.

At the beginning of this month, the BBC's *Global News Podcast*, *The Economist Podcasts* and *The Rest Is Politics*, which is hosted by New Labour spin doctor Alastair Campbell and ex-Tory minister Rory Stewart, all featured in the top 10 most popular UK podcasts.

At an RTS Futures event in late May, two podcast pros – BBC specialist disinformation and social media reporter Marianna Spring and Nina Hodgson, senior producer for *Channel 4 News's The Fourcast* and the long-form interview

The booming audio format offers programme-makers the chance to take a deep dive into stories and ideas that inspire them

podcast *Ways to Change the World* (with Krishnan Guru-Murthy), discussed all things podcast, including offering helpful tips to newcomers (see box).

Spring is the host of two BBC Radio 4 podcasts: *War on Truth*, about the information war that is going on hand in hand with the actual war in

Ukraine, and *Death by Conspiracy?*, which tells the story of a pandemic denier, Gary Matthews, who died of Covid-19.

The audio format gives news and current affairs specialists the space – denied them in brief bulletins – to investigate topics and people's experiences in greater depth. Spring told the RTS: "It's wonderful to be able to spend hours at a time with someone... to really understand their story. There's a lot of time for talking and listening."

The death of Matthews, an artist and photographer from Shrewsbury, made the headlines at the beginning of 2021 and gave Spring the hook for her 10-part podcast, *Death by Conspiracy?* "[It was] a story that was emblematic

of a wider issue that I'd spent a lot of time investigating – it's really powerful to have one person at the heart of [a podcast]," she explained.

War on Truth follows the stories of a series of people who "found themselves caught up in the information war.... It sounds so much more powerful when you are hearing from real people... you want to hear people's emotions and about their experiences, as well as the more investigative elements."

One episode focuses on a woman who was informed that her son, a border guard, had been killed on Snake Island, in the Black Sea, having famously told the attacking forces, "Russian warship: go fuck yourself". The truth was more complicated as her son was being held in Russia before his return to Ukraine as part of a prisoner of war exchange.

Spring recalled: "When you're listening to a podcast you want to experience all the highs and lows with the person you're talking to."

The BBC journalist, a Russian speaker, spoke to the woman, Tetyana, in Russian. "I have found it really useful to be able to communicate... in someone's native language – in her case, Russian – because they are able to explain what it felt like and they talk you through the experience in a very vivid way, which is really essential to podcasts," said Spring.

The Fourcast, hosted by *Channel 4 News* digital reporter Kiran Moodley, goes out three times a week and "allows us to take a longer, slower look at some evolving news stories from the week", explained Hodgson.

"We have so much more time to talk and think about what we want to do," she continued.

More of Moodley's personality – and more emotion – comes through in the podcast than a short TV news package permits, explained Hodgson. "You can have light and shade within something, which, if you only had three minutes, you'd have to be very serious about. You can take a slightly different tone."

In podcasts, added Spring, "personality is really important; I think news has often been scared of personality... whereas I think it actually enriches what we're saying, and can make it really powerful and interesting." ■

Report by Matthew Bell. The RTS Futures event 'Making podcasts: A mini-masterclass' was held on 31 May. It was chaired and produced by Ed Gove, multimedia producer at Channel 4 News.



Nina Hodgson



Marianna Spring

How to become a podcaster

Ideas are the currency of podcasts

'You need an [idea] that's really interesting... but you also need to be able to stand that up for 25 minutes,' said Nina Hodgson from *Channel 4 News*. 'Show you have the basic skills and really understand the concept of podcasts and why things work for them.'

'Think of things that are emblematic of wider issues... one person who's been affected by something terrible or had a certain experience that you can really interrogate and tell [us more about],' said the BBC's Marianna Spring. 'Some of the most popular podcasts on the BBC have done that, from unpicking what happened on Capitol Hill in [Gabriel Gatehouse's] *The Coming Storm* on Radio 4 to *Fairy Meadow*, which was about a little girl who'd gone missing.'

'Find something that really catches your attention [that] you can investigate in more depth and that has a range of different voices.'

Build relationships

'A lot of the reporting I do is inspired or triggered by people getting in touch with me and telling me about their own experiences – something that they want me to investigate in terms of social media or disinformation,' said Spring.

'Put in the effort to meet them... If people trust you, they are much more willing to share things that they might

feel apprehensive about.... It makes the journalism so much better and a podcast so much more powerful if you're hearing from someone in a really open and genuine way.'

Give it a go

Early in a career, said Hodgson, 'there can be a lot of imposter syndrome.... Don't bend the truth... be honest if you're just starting out.... Being a journalist is about talking to people about their stories and investigating things.... So, if you're interested in something, have the confidence to speak to someone and develop a story.'

'You can get training in how to use certain software or how to record stuff,' added Spring, but 'a lot of it is learning by doing – writing a podcast script, interviewing someone... there's no special podcast course that you can go to and suddenly you're a qualified podcaster'.

Hodgson noted: 'Unless you are making a podcast for the BBC or Channel 4, people aren't expecting it to be studio quality.'

Spring advised: 'Be courageous, take risks.... Have a go yourself... you might not have many people listening to your podcast, but that's totally fine because it's a space for you to test stuff out and to show people [later] when you are pitching things. Never feel embarrassed or silly – just give it a shot.'



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‘Take heart, it’s the best time to be getting into the industry – we need you. If you’ve got the skills and [show] enthusiasm, then you’re very likely to be successful.’

These encouraging words came from Kate Efomi, training liaison manager, Scotland, at the industry skills body ScreenSkills.

Efomi was working at BBC Birmingham as a trainee researcher, when she “got a call to come up and work on *Songs of Praise* for 10 weeks in Glasgow – 20 years later, I’m still here and loving it.”

Efomi added: “Enthusiasm goes a really, really long way... make yourself indispensable to your line manager or head of department – that’s how you make your mark. They might be going on to another job and they might ask you to come with them.”

Kaljeven Singh Lally studied sound engineering at university and, since starting work, has moved up the ladder from assistant editor to editor and now director.

He has been shadowing directors on a block of the BBC Scotland soap *River City* and is slated to direct an episode later this year.

Echoing Efomi, Lally said: “In the past few years, there’s been this massive explosion of work... it is a really good time to be trying to break in.”

To stand out from the crowd, he added, “You need to be the keenest person in the room... you should be super-passionate”.

Professor Dario Sinforiani, who oversees the practical modules on the TV, film and journalism degrees at the University of Stirling, said: “Learn to be a team player; lots of people come into production as students with high aspirations to eventually direct, but what you’ve got to



Boom time in Scotland

RTS Scotland Matthew Bell heard an expert panel offer advice on how to break into and build a career in television

learn in the first instance is that production involves working in teams and you have to be [seen as] a reliable, organised team player to get anywhere.

“Try to take advantage of any opportunities that come your way... but also try to make opportunities for yourself.”

Students, said Sinforiani, should make their own contacts and seek out work experience, in order to “take control of their own destiny”.

He added: “Doing well in your degree is important, but that’s not necessarily going to be the only thing that gets you a job. Keep making stuff on your own and [take] any opportunities you get to make contacts.”

The RTS Scotland session

included advice on drawing up a CV, which BBC Studios talent executive Jane McLaughlin said was “a chance to market yourself to potential employers and let them see at a glance... what you can bring to them”.

CVs, explained the panellists, should include contact details, a short personal introduction, key skills, work history and educational qualifications. A brief and focused cover letter should accompany the CV, targeted at the specific job opportunity.

McLaughlin said: “Initially, we’re looking for CVs that... really do demonstrate the skills and experience someone can bring us.”

Jeannot Hutcheson, talent manager at Glasgow indie

Raise the Roof Productions, added: “There’s a baseline of transferable skills that I’m always looking for on a CV, so I’m not expecting someone who’s just come out of university to have a whole list of broadcast credits... I’m looking for what transferrable skills they’ve got.”

This could include jobs in bars, shops or a call centre that demonstrate the ability to deal with people or candidates’ administrative skills. ■

Kevin McCormick, head of production, UK operations, BBC Studios, chaired the RTS Scotland event ‘TV training: Getting in and getting noticed’, held on 10 May. The full video recording can be watched at: bit.ly/ScotRTS.

Southern Centre

Fred Dinenage was honoured at the RTS Southern Awards with a Special Award for his huge contribution to television over almost six decades.

Presenting the award, RTS Southern Deputy Chair Alison Martin praised the veteran broadcaster's "sincerity, good humour, professionalism and warmth", adding: "Thank you for your contribution to television and broadcasting in the South of England."

Dinenage, who presented *ITV News Meridian* until last year and is a former host of *World of Sport*, will continue to work in the industry, including on the relaunched CITV show *How*. He first appeared on TV in 1964, co-presenting Southern Television's kids' show *Three Go Round*, and went on to co-host ITV's 6:00pm news programmes in Southern England for nearly four decades.

The RTS Southern Awards were announced at an online ceremony in May by *BBC South Today* host David Allard and his *ITV News Meridian* counterpart, Sangeeta Bhabra. Many local famous faces, including husband and wife actors James Murray and Sarah Parish, Hugh Fernley Whittingstall, Esther Rantzen and Harry Redknapp filmed contributions for the ceremony.

ITV News Meridian picked up four of the seven awards recognising journalism and news teams in the region:

Afghan doc lands prize



My Childhood, My Country: 20 Years in Afghanistan

Special Features Journalist (Andrew Pate); On-Screen Newcomer (Ravneet Nandra); Digital Team; and Special Event Coverage (David Fuller).

BBC South Today took the prize for Regional News Magazine Programme, an award accepted by Allard. Colin Campbell, whose "compassion towards his contributors genuinely serves the wider public interest", said the judges, was Best Regional Journalist.

The award for Strand

Within a News Programme went to Pod Films's *Brighton: Covid One Year On* for *Channel 4 News*. The indie's founder, Dave Young, also won the Camera prize.

Woodcut Media was another double winner, with Robert Hull picking up the Graphics and Animation prize and Vicky Chapman taking home the Post-production award.

The Documentary prize was awarded to Seventh Art Productions for its ITV film *My*

Childhood, My Country: 20 Years in Afghanistan, which the judges said was "a brilliant documentary filmed over a 20-year period", offering a "unique, first-hand account of growing up in a war-torn country".

In the student categories, the awards were shared by the region's universities.

The Drama prize went to *Flutterby*, made by a team from the University of Sussex. The judges said the film was "well cast, well shot, and its sublime editing and lighting kept a lightness of pace in a very heavy subject".

Markus Øvre, University for the Creative Arts, won the Animation prize for the "beautifully crafted and engaging" *In Harmony*, while Solent University took the Factual award for *On Board DH23*. The Comedy and Entertainment award went to *Sunday Roast* by students at the Arts University Bournemouth.

Matthew Bell

RTS Southern Television Awards winners

Industry Categories

- **Special Award** - Fred Dinenage
- **Documentary or Factual** - *My Childhood, My Country: 20 Years in Afghanistan* - Seventh Art Productions for ITV
- **Entertainment** - *Celebrity Help! My House is Haunted* - Back2Back Productions for Discovery+
- **Regional News Magazine Programme** - *BBC South Today*
- **Regional Television Journalist** - Colin Campbell - BBC South East

- **Special Feature Journalist** - Andrew Pate - ITV News Meridian
- **Special Event Coverage by a Regional News Magazine Programme** - David Fuller, *Guilty* - ITV Meridian East
- **Strand Within a News or Magazine Programme** - *Covid One Year On* - Pod Films for Channel 4 News
- **Digital Team** - ITV News Meridian
- **On-screen Newcomer** - Ravneet Nandra - ITV News Meridian
- **Graphics and Animation** - Robert Hull - Woodcut Media
- **Short Form** - *The One Show: Learning Disability Rugby* - Topical TV for BBC One

- **Camera** - Dave Young - Pod Films
- **Post-production** - Vicky Chapman - Woodcut Media
- **Student Categories**
- **Animation** - *In Harmony* - Markus Øvre, University for the Creative Arts
- **Comedy and Entertainment** - *Sunday Roast* - Lukas Steinmaier, Stacey Vlasjuk and Dimi Vakrilov, Arts University Bournemouth
- **Drama** - *Flutterby* - Oliver Gordon, Sophie Norman, Milly Dutton and Sonny Lieberman, University of Sussex
- **Factual** - *On Board DH23* - Cameron Tait, Kiran Wallace, Teddy Howes and Belinda Villa Rodriguez, Solent University

Local legend Gloria Hunniford was awarded the Brian Waddell Award for her outstanding contribution to the broadcast industry over more than 60 years, at the RTS Northern Ireland Awards in late May.

Hunniford was recognised at a ceremony in City Hall, Belfast, hosted by actor Denise Van Outen – but only just. A flight cancellation and change of airport delayed her, but the TV presenter made it in time to pick up her award.

Born in Portadown, Hunniford started out as a production assistant at the launch of Ulster Television in 1959. She moved in front of the camera, working as a journalist and presenter on UTV's *Good Evening Ulster*, and then fronted shows on the BBC and ITV, including *Sunday Sunday*, *Holiday* and *Songs of Praise*.

Hunniford is still a familiar face on BBC One's *Rip off Britain* and ITV's *Loose Women*.

"I am so honoured and thrilled to receive this award, especially as Brian Waddell gave me my first major daily TV programme with *Good Evening Ulster* – he was a great inspiration and friend to me," said Hunniford.

RTS Northern Ireland Chair Fiona Campbell said: "Back in the 1970s, Gloria paved the way for others like me to break into the all-too-often male-dominated newsrooms. She is a true trailblazer and



From left to right: Denise Van Outen, Eamonn Holmes, Gloria Hunniford and Zach Willis (from awards sponsor Ka-Boom)

PressEye

Hunniford honoured

one of our own who continues to be a role model for women in the creative industries."

The programme prizes at the ceremony were spread around the province's producers. Stellify Media took home the Entertainment award for the Channel 4 property show *Celebrity Snoop Dogs* and Fired Up Films was awarded the Documentary prize for *Delorean: Back from the Future*, made for BBC Northern Ireland.

Studio Lambert's *Three*

Families, written by Gwyneth Hughes for BBC One, secured the Drama prize. The hard-hitting, two-part programme was set in the years running up to the decriminalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland.

Celebrity travel show *High Road: Low Road*, from Green Inc Film and Television for RTÉ, won in the Features/Factual Entertainment category, while the award for Outstanding On-Screen Talent went to Patrick Kielty for *One Hundred Years of Union* by Dragonfly Film and Television and the Open University for BBC One.

Colm Tóibín: On Memory's Shore, a documentary portrait of the acclaimed author of *Brooklyn* and made by Below the Radar for RTÉ One, took home the Specialist Factual award.

The Current Affairs prize was presented to *Spotlight: Undercover Pups for Sale*, made for BBC Northern Ireland,

while *UTV Live* picked up the News award for its *Ballymurphy News Special*.

The sketch show *The Paddy Raff Show*, made by Nice One Productions for BBC One Northern Ireland, won the Scripted comedy prize.

Hannah Peel received the Original Music Score award for *The Deceived*, produced by New Pictures for Channel 5.

"This is the seventh year of our programme awards and the high quality of all the entries is hugely reflective of our dynamic creative community and the tremendous programmes created during lockdown to entertain the nation," said Maeve McLoughlin, Chair of RTS Northern Ireland Awards Committee.

The awards were held in partnership with BBC Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Screen and Channel 4, along with headline sponsor Ka-Boom. **Matthew Bell**

RTS Northern Ireland Television Awards winners

Brian Waddell Award - Gloria Hunniford

Drama - *Three Families* - Studio Lambert for BBC One

Entertainment - *Celebrity Snoop Dogs* - Stellify Media for Channel 4

Scripted Comedy - *The Paddy Raff Show* - Nice One Productions for BBC Northern Ireland

Documentary - *Delorean: Back from the Future* - Fired Up Films for BBC Northern Ireland

Specialist Factual - *Colm Tóibín: On Memory's Shore* - Below the Radar for RTÉ One

Features/Factual Entertainment -

High Road, Low Road - Green Inc Film and Television for RTÉ

Current Affairs - *Spotlight: Undercover: Pups for Sale* - BBC Northern Ireland

News Coverage - *UTV Live - Ballymurphy News Special* - UTV

Outstanding On-screen Talent - Patrick Kielty, *One Hundred Years of Union* - Dragonfly Film and Television and Open University for BBC One

Children's/Animation - *Sol* - Paper Owl Films for TG4, S4C and BBC Alba

Original Music Score - Hannah Peel, *The Deceived* - New Pictures for Channel 5



Kay Mellor 1951–2022

Rollem Productions

■ Kay Mellor, who has died aged 71, was a prolific and influential TV dramatist whose impact is still evident in contemporary series such as Channel 4 comedy *Hullraisers*.

Working mainly for ITV and BBC One, she put working-class women at the centre of her stories in series such as *Band of Gold*, *Fat Friends*, *The Syndicate*, *In the Club* and *Playing the Field*, which focused on a women's football team.

Kay, who was made a Fellow of the RTS in 2016, was a regular speaker at Society events. She was a

panellist on “Is older the new younger?” in 2018, recalling the male-dominated broadcasting world she encountered early in her TV career: “When I started on *Coronation Street*, even the female parts were all written by men.”

Kay grew up on a Leeds council estate, where she was brought up by her mother after her physically abusive father, a vacuum cleaner salesman, was shown the door. Much of her drama was based in Leeds, where she was educated at West Park school and Park Lane College.

“When I watch my work on television or in the theatre, I can see how Leeds has influenced me,” she once said.

Her first contact with TV was as an actor, playing a doctor in Granada's medical show *The Practice*, in 1985. After being cast in another Granada series, *Albion Market*, where she'd written an episode on spec, she became one of the show's storyliners.

In 1986, she joined the writing team on *Coronation Street*, working alongside Paul Abbott. The pair created *Children's Ward*. With its gritty subject matter taking in drugs, alcoholism and cancer, the series was a marker for much of her subsequent work.

The show that secured her success was *Band of Gold*, the Granada-produced drama about a group of Bradford sex workers. The inspiration for the series was a chance encounter in Lumb Lane, Bradford's red-light district.

“I could see a young girl and immediately thought, ‘She's a prostitute.’ The girl stepped forward and bobbed down to look into the car to see if there was a potential punter,” she recounted.

“She could only have been 13 or 14 and had blonde hair, a denim jacket, a crop top, a leather miniskirt and white high-heeled shoes. Her legs were bare – they were completely blue and mottled with

the cold. I just remember being completely shocked because I had daughters of her age. I felt as if someone had just punched me in the stomach and winded me.”

Band of Gold ran for three series. *Playing the Field* and an adaptation of *Jane Eyre* followed. In 2000, Kay set up her own production company, Rollem Productions, which made *Fat Friends*, centred on a Leeds slimming group and a returning hit for ITV.

In 2010, Kay made her debut as the director of a TV series on *A Passionate Woman*. She subsequently worked as a director on: *The Syndicate*, the stories of lottery winners; *In the Club*, featuring the lives of a group of women who meet at antenatal classes; and *Girlfriends*, the story of three middle-aged women, friends since teenagers.

It's tempting to say that Kay's own life was like one of the characters in her dramas. She met her husband, Anthony, on a blind date when she was 16 and married him at 17. Many thought the union wouldn't last but it did.

The couple's two daughters, Yvonne, a producer (*Death in Paradise*), and Gaynor, an actor, most recently in *The Syndicate*, followed their mother into TV. Kay, who received an OBE in 2009, is survived by Anthony, Yvonne and Gaynor.

Steve Clarke

George Pagan 1929–2022

■ Long-time RTS member George Pagan has died at the age of 92. He worked at the BBC over five decades in programme services and engineering.

Glasgow-born George began at the BBC in 1945 as a trainee in sound effects at Broadcasting House, moving to Bristol in 1954 as a studio

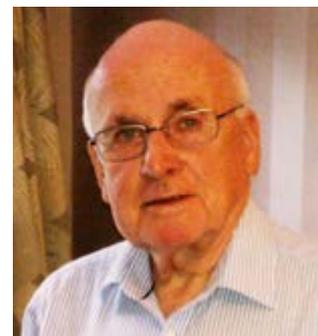
manager. In 1965, he became Midlands programme services organiser. A year later, he joined the RTS.

George then retrained as an engineer, and returned to Birmingham in 1979, where he ended his career as chief engineer for the regions.

Ann Gumbley-Williams, of White Rabbit Productions,

recalled working with George at Pebble Mill Studios: “I have great memories of George's help, expertise and organising skills – he had a lot of patience. It was certainly a privilege to work with him.”

George, who described his 43 years in the BBC as an “absolute privilege”, died



peacefully at home in Redditch, Worcestershire. He is survived by his wife, Helen.

Priya Dogra to chair convention

London Convention

Warner Bros Discovery's Priya Dogra has been named as Chair of the Society's biennial London Convention, titled "The fight for attention", in late September.

Speakers at the leading television industry event include BBC Director-General Tim Davie, Channel 4 CEO Alex Mahon, ITV CEO Carolyn McCall and Stephen van Rooyen, executive vice-president and CEO, UK and Europe, Sky, with more high-profile speakers to be announced shortly.

"With more choice than ever before of what to watch

and how to watch it, the fight for consumer attention between broadcasters, streamers and other types of entertainment is changing the way we create, compete, and collaborate," said Dogra.

She is Warner Bros Discovery's President and Managing Director for EMEA (excluding Poland).

RTS CEO Theresa Wise added: "It's been four years since we physically gathered together in London to explore the seismic shifts and emerging trends in the UK's television landscape, and hear from industry leaders from across the globe.



Priya Dogra

Warner Media

"We're thrilled to have Priya Dogra as Chair and the Warner Bros Discovery team as principal sponsor for the convention this year."

The London convention

will take place on 27 September at Kings Place, London. To book a place, visit: rts.org.uk/event/rts-london-convention-2022

Matthew Bell



Platinum-rated gravitas and gaiety

What a joyous occasion and much-needed tonic the long Platinum Jubilee weekend was for our battered nation. By common consent, the BBC rose to the occasion superbly.

It was an inspired piece of casting to have Kirsty Young, a much-missed *Desert Island Discs* presenter, anchor the national broadcaster's live coverage of the St Paul's service of thanksgiving.

Her sense of what one commentator described as "quiet intimacy" and lilting tones will be remembered as one of the highlights of the marathon coverage.

Gravitas is essential for these occasions and Kirsty has this in abundance. Having suffered from the debilitating condition fibromyalgia, her return to our screens was especially welcome. The UpSide hopes she will soon be back on the airwaves.

Paddington crashes the palace for tea

And the weekend's most charming TV moment? No question – the monarch's delightful surprise encounter with Paddington Bear. Both confessed to carrying around a marmalade sandwich as an emergency snack.

This live-action animation of the Queen and the famous children's character having tea drew comparisons to James Bond's daring appearance at Buckingham Palace during the 2012 London Olympics opening ceremony.

The sketch kicked off Saturday night's star-studded Platinum Party. The concert gave the BBC its biggest TV audience of the year, with more than 13 million viewers.

It was shown in the US by ABC News, and a stream of the event is available on Hulu as well as BBC iPlayer. Expect more record-breaking audience figures.

Birthday gongs for our TV heroines

Staying with the monarch's birthday, it was good to see the achievements of two of British TV's most exceptional women honoured in the Queen's Birthday Honours.

Step forward All3Media CEO and RTS Chair, Jane Turton, and the tireless diversity campaigner and head of the CDN, Deborah Williams. Jane was awarded an OBE for her services to

the TV production industry, while Deborah's OBE recognised her services to diversity in the arts and creative industries. Congratulations to both.

An autobiographical murder mystery

Finally, there once was a time when the summer TV season was synonymous with repeats. Thankfully, no more.

The brilliant James Graham, whose *Quiz* helped us survive the early days of lockdown, has written *Sherwood*, a new, six-part crime thriller for BBC One inspired by his Nottinghamshire childhood during the 1984-85 miners strike.

Starring David Morrissey and Lesley Manville, it looks set to add some grit to our summer viewing menu.

And for light relief, there's eight weeks of series 8 of ITV2's *Love Island* to lap up.



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