

March 2021

# Television



**Channel 5's  
Boleyn girl**

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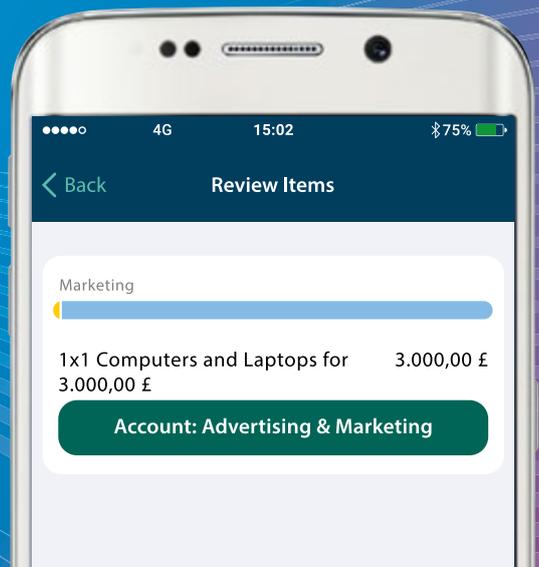
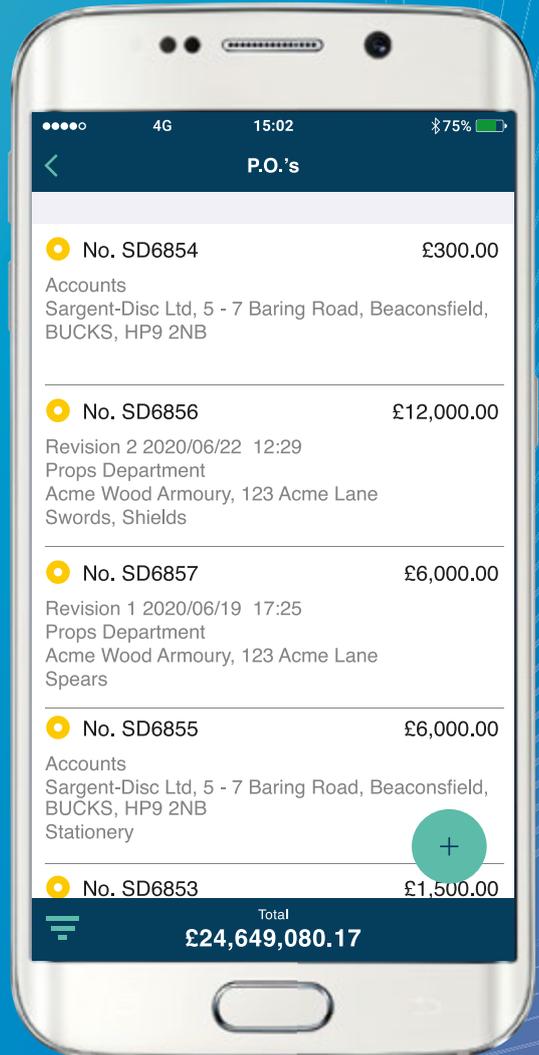
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## From the CEO



We are all still stuck in lockdown, but I am delighted to say that the industry turned up in virtual droves to celebrate the nominees and winners of this year's RTS Television Journalism Awards. A huge thanks to the evening's hosts, Mishal Husain and Simon Bucks, for doing such a great job, and to all the juries. Congratulations to the winners.

Not even the lack of a physical audience could stop the irrepressible Sky News editor, John Ryley, from giving an emotional acceptance speech as Sky News was once again voted News Channel of the Year.

Thanks, too, to the always upbeat Ore Oduba for hosting the nominations for the RTS Programme Awards. Since you've asked, we'll be announcing the winners on 16 March, when our host will be that doyen of the TV talk show, Jonathan Ross. Don't miss the live stream on the RTS website.

Our cover story is Channel 5's innovative approach to drama. The station's gripping thriller *The Drowning* was a genuine treat. I can't wait to see its scripted take on Anne Boleyn, starring Jodie Turner-Smith as the ill-fated Tudor queen.

French TV drama is enjoying a purple patch: Stuart Kemp explains why the likes of Netflix's *Call My Agent!* and

*Spiral* have become global blockbusters.

A recent Creative Diversity Network report makes hard reading for all of us who want British TV to be genuinely inclusive. Please read Rosie Jones and Deborah Williams's passionate pleas to the industry to recruit more disabled people on both sides of the camera.

Finally, if wild swimming intrigues you, turn to Katy Boulton's *Our Friend* column – though some of us might wait until it feels more like spring to take the plunge.

Theresa Wise

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# TV diary

**Newsround's Ricky Boletto** regularly makes sense of tough stories for CBBC but is shocked that his garden shed has gone viral



**I** think it's fair to say that reporting for *Newsround* is a job like no other in journalism. I know John Craven and all those who've followed in his footsteps would agree. This week alone, I've gone from explaining the situation in Myanmar to revealing which celebrity was behind the sausage costume on ITV's *The Masked Singer*. In case you were wondering, it was Joss Stone... all in a day's work for a *Newsround* presenter.

■ The week starts with a short walk to the end of the garden. I'm currently working from home and, like so many of us, I've become accustomed to this ultra-short commute.

Over Christmas, I converted a garden shed into a "state of the art" home studio. It's got lights, a TV monitor, various tripods, cameras... the works. Getting reliable internet to the back of the garden was tricky and it is ice cold first thing in the morning.

It's a sacrifice I'm willing to make, because having this home studio means I can continue to work for *Newsround* without having to travel to the studio in MediaCity UK in Salford.

It has also brightened up all those Zoom meetings where, instead of sitting in front of yet another bookshelf, I'm sat in my shed.

■ I'm a bit overwhelmed by the amount of interest there is in my

shed. I shared a picture of the renovations on social media and it's gone viral. I've had messages from shed lovers all over the world... it has also made it on to the BBC News homepage – this is ridiculous.

I suppose we've all had to adapt one way or another over the past year when it comes to how we work, and it seems my shed has caught everyone's imagination.

■ The BBC's brilliant tech correspondent, **Rory Cellan-Jones**, has been in touch and asked me if I can sort out his working from home set-up, which is covered in wires and extension leads. I'll be over as soon as I can Rory!

■ Back to the day job now, and it's internet safety day, all beamed live on the CBBC channel from the CBBC studio – and with me in the infamous shed.

In the CBBC studio today is Hacker T Dog, Wigan's answer to Edd the Duck and way funnier, too. Phil Fletcher is CBBC's resident puppeteer. He has me in stitches whenever I get to work with him.

■ It's still a bit mind boggling to see my shed on TV. My three-year-old is watching in our living room while I'm at the back of the garden. He gives me a massive hug when I return indoors.

The next day, I'm heading out to try and film a piece to camera for a report about cladding. We're featuring two young children who live in flats that need to have it removed. Stories like this can be a challenge, especially when we have to refer to the Grenfell Tower tragedy, where 72 people lost their lives.

*Newsround* never shies away from reporting these kinds of stories, but we are mindful about the way we tell them.

■ Back on the box and back in the shed, this time for *BBC Breakfast* to talk about children's mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic.

It's clear that each lockdown has brought different challenges for young people and I've been hearing about their struggles with home schooling and feelings around loneliness.

As restrictions start to ease, one thing that this lockdown has taught me is just how brilliant all my colleagues are. They've continued to get *Newsround* on air and online throughout the past year.

It's heart-warming to get messages from our viewers, who say that we've been there for them and part of their daily routine, even when everything else has changed.

*Ricky Boletto is a presenter on Newsround.*

# COMFORT CLASSIC

## Friends



Netflix

It's a sign of a true TV phenomenon when any one of a handful of catchphrases, a haircut, a song about a malodorous puss or just a single word – “Pivot!” – can instantly propel you back to the turn of the millennium and six people gathered in a West Village apartment, always strangely affordable, or on their local coffee shop sofa, always strangely available.

*Friends* was that phenomenon and so it continues to be. It is one of Netflix's biggest global titles. The show's departure from the streaming giant's US service ignited a fresh surge in DVD sales – 17 years after *Friends* signed off at NBC.

The show's final episode aired to a US audience of more than 50 million, making it the fourth most-watched series finale in history.

By then, *Friends* had run for 10 seasons, an astonishing 236 episodes, and made superstars of its lead actors – Jennifer Aniston, Courteney Cox, Lisa

The US sitcom both defined and transcended an era. **Caroline Frost** discovers why audiences remain addicted to it

Kudrow, Matt LeBlanc, Matthew Perry and David Schwimmer.

The show was originally devised by producers David Crane and Marta Kauffman around a simple premise, that of “six people in their twenties making their way in Manhattan”. For a decade, the show never strayed far from that single idea – and that, throughout the trials, triumphs and tribulations of early adult life, your friends become the family you choose.

Rewatching *Friends* now, what's freshly impressive is how fully formed each of the characters is from the off.

There are comprehensive back stories of family dysfunction as well as distinctive individual traits to each member of the group: Joey's small brain but big heart, Monica's incessant control-freakery, Rachel's challenges with financial independence, Ross's comfort with dinosaurs over people, Phoebe's otherworldly quirkiness and Chandler's good looks belying his sarcastic awkwardness.

It's all there, as well as the group's

# Ear candy

bottomless comradeship. Nobody misses a first night of Joey's new play, and everyone, of course, attends the wedding of Ross's ex-wife.

These six people may be competitive, cheeky and fall out with each other at regular intervals but, ultimately, this is a tight band whose bonds are fast and true. Knowing this makes for a very relaxing viewing experience.

Of course, this could all have become unbearably mawkish, but it is saved by the scripts. "The *Friends* writers room was simultaneously a party room and a prison cell," according to Saul Austerlitz, author of *Generation Friends: An Inside Look at the Show That Defined a Television Era*.

Each 22-minute episode is packed with one-liners and running jokes that play to everything we already know, plus, most crucially of all, the stars' great chemistry.

Only when guest stars such as Helen Hunt, George Clooney and Noah Wyle (as ER doctors, no less), Julia Roberts and Brad Pitt turn up to do a turn does it become clear just how special the interaction between our leading six really is. Their effortless timing and understanding of one another make them hard for even those talented co-stars to keep up with.

This strength in numbers was something the stars enjoyed off-screen as well, where their unity became a superpower when it came to salary renegotiation. By seasons 9 and 10, they were each earning \$1m an episode, as well as pocketing syndication royalties from 2000 onwards.

Some of the storylines in *Friends* are more likely than others for a bunch of Manhattan twentysomethings, but we go with it, and them, through 10 seasons of births, deaths, secret romances, accidental weddings and judgemental parents.

Why? Because, just as for the gang on-screen, there's a great comfort in knowing that we can always come back to that kitchen table or that coffee shop sofa, and revel in the company of those friends who, in the face of triumph or disaster, always have your back. ■

**Friends is on Comedy Central and Netflix.**



Hattie Crisell

**W**riting is so often a solitary and arduous pursuit that podcasts such as *In Writing with Hattie Crisell* are a welcome refuge.

In each episode of *In Writing*, journalist Hattie Crisell seeks solidarity and insight from one of the best of any and all genres. Among the 27 to date are playwright and screenwriter Lucy Prebble, novelist David Nicholls and writer and performer Robert Webb.

The interviews feel less like formal conversations than intimate visits. Crisell starts each one by asking the writer to describe their writing room.

The answers set the scene and give the first insight, with the working environment usually informing the process. Prebble's bare room is designed to avoid distraction, while Nicholls likes

his filled with photos, music and books for "subliminal inspiration".

The writers then retrace their roads to success and share the lessons they learned along the way. This is at once reassuring and inspiring. Especially those, like Jon Ronson, whose roads were paved with rejection letters.

Now an award-winning screenwriter, Ronson admits to receiving a particularly humiliating response to the first script he sent on spec to the BBC: "Usually, when we reject submissions, we like to offer some encouragement but, in your case, we don't see any point in you continuing."

Each episode offers a similar comforting reminder that failure and self-doubt are universal. So why do we do it, asks Crisell. Ronson recalls Randy Newman's answer to the same question: "It's how I judge myself and how I feel better." Listen to *In Writing* and you'll feel better about writing. ■

**Harry Bennett**



# WORKING LIVES Director

Bridgerton

Netflix

**Sheree Folkson** is one of the directors on Netflix's biggest ever series, the period drama *Bridgerton*.

During a long career spanning TV and film, she has worked with some of the best actors and writers in the business.

## What does the job involve?

We take a script and turn it into a living, breathing thing.

## That sounds simple, but surely it takes time to make a show?

I start work, as sole director, on a four-part drama in the UK at the end of April. Sole directors are involved in the early creative decisions and also have to cast and crew a series, so I'm already looking at actors and crew with the producers and writer. It will be shooting until September and editing until November.

## Is it done differently in the US?

I work a lot in the US, where I can finish a one-hour episode in just three weeks – that's maybe seven days' prep, shooting for 10 and an edit in just four days. The American system is

completely different, although not all US shows I make are shot that quickly. It depends on the budget.

## Who do you work with most closely on a production?

The producer, director of photography (DoP), production designer, first assistant director, the cast, the editor and [with the US way of working] the writers and showrunner.

If I start a show, I also work closely with the writer, costume, make-up and hair and casting departments. With the British system, you don't work so much with the writers on set, but on *Bridgerton*, which was shot in the UK but using the US system, the writer or showrunner was on set every day.

## Do you enjoy sitting in the editing suite?

I do enjoy the edit. There's less time pressure and you haven't got 100 people looking at you, thinking, "What now?" It's just you and the editor in a room. The hardest bit of the job is being on set filming. But it also gives

you a great buzz of adrenaline, which you don't get in the edit.

## How did you become a director?

I was obsessed by old movies – I loved Hitchcock and William Wyler as directors, and watching Bette Davis, Barbara Stanwyck and Hollywood musicals.

The directors were always men and I never thought about becoming one, but it was the female stars who often carried the movies. So, I went to drama school but then struggled to find much work, though I did play a Munchkin in *The Wizard of Oz* at Newcastle Playhouse!

I gave up acting and went to university and did a politics degree. Then I decided I needed to do something creative and was accepted by the BBC on its graduate trainee scheme.

## That sounds like great training?

It was amazing – I spent two years working in different departments, working out where I fitted in. There was an eclectic mix of people – future BBC political editor Nick Robinson was in my year.



David Tennant in *Casanova*

BBC

**What was the first TV programme you directed?**

I started to direct factual programmes for the BBC One religious and ethical series *Heart of the Matter* and BBC Two arts programme *The Late Show*. My first drama was a factual piece, *The Trials of Oz*, based on the transcripts from the 1971 obscenity trial of the alternative *Oz* magazine. It was a hilarious contrast between the counter-culture and the old guard. I had the most amazing cast: Alfred Molina, Nigel Hawthorne, Hugh Grant, who wasn't yet famous, and Leslie Phillips as the judge.

**What came next?**

An episode of *The Bill*, but I found it creatively uninteresting – it was a formula and I couldn't bring anything to it. I returned to docs for a while, but then I got the chance to direct and produce *A Royal Scandal* about the terrible marriage of George IV, starring Richard E Grant. I loved it and stuck with drama.

**What do you bring with you to work?**  
My iPad, which has the script on it, a

water bottle and, when I'm filming, loads of warm clothing and water-proofs – I get really cold. If I'm outside, I've been known to bring my hot-water bottle, too.

**What makes a good director?**

Understanding the script and the writer's intentions is key, as is having a point of view and vision of your own. Clear communication with cast and crew, imagination and understanding the craft of the actor are also important.

**Do you need technical knowledge?**

I know what I want something to look like – I'm very strong on the visual look. But I trust my DoP and camera operator on how to achieve it technically.

**Which work are you most proud of?**

*Casanova* – the script from Russell T Davies was just fantastic. He's like a poet; his words sing and have such wit. It was inspiring and it inspired me to make something bold. We had David Tennant and Peter O'Toole in the cast – it was a wonderful experience.

**How does it feel to be involved with a runaway success like *Bridgerton*?**

Obviously, it feels great. I have always loved period drama – both watching and making it – particularly those with a more modern/irreverent eye. I knew we were making something special, but I had no idea it would appeal to such an amazingly large audience. It's very fulfilling to think that so many people have watched your work.

**Television or film?**

I think they've always been indistinguishable. You need the same skills and creativity as a director to tell stories, whether they are for TV or film – I really can't see what the difference is from a creative point of view. From a skill-set angle, you have less time to shoot TV, so it can be more challenging in that way.

**What are the best and worst parts of the job?**

The best is being able to use your creativity and imagination, and working with a large group of talented people who bring their own creativity and imagination to the table. Making television and film is a communal experience. The worst is when time is short – when I'm filming, I'm frequently fighting the clock, which is hugely frustrating. And getting up early.

**What advice would you give to someone wanting to direct?**

Watch as much as you can. Go back to the old movies as well as watching contemporary film and TV – there are so many things you can draw on.

**So, is it a golden age for TV directors?**

There are so many more outlets for content than when I first started directing, when there were just four TV channels making drama in the UK. That's good for TV directors.

**Has the job changed over time?**

There's less sexism and many more female directors. Considering that we're 50% of the population, though, we're still way behind.

**Is there any genre you'd love to direct?**

I want to do a musical more than anything. ■

*Sheree Folkson was interviewed by Matthew Bell. The director is represented by Casarotto Ramsay.*



# Channel 5's drive for drama

Shilpa Ganatra speaks to **Sebastian Cardwell**, the man spearheading the station's innovative approach to TV's dominant genre

**T**here must be something in the water at Channel 5. In 2020, it won Channel of the Year at both the RTS Programme Awards and the Broadcast Awards. The RTS's judges remarked that it was "a confident broadcaster reaping the rewards of years of steady growth and development – a channel that increasingly now both surprises and delights".

That momentum careered into 2021, as *The Drowning* – the four-parter about a mother who befriends a child she believes is her missing son – became its most-watched drama to date. A record 5.1 million tuned in for the first episode.

*The Drowning's* success is no fluke. The channel has been dabbling in drama since its flagship show, *Big Brother*, was cancelled in 2018. The

following year, Channel 5 gave us *Cold Call* (seen by 2.6 million viewers), and in 2020, a year which also saw it air *Penance* and the second series of *Blood, The Deceived*, written by Lisa McGee and Tobias Beer, attracted an audience of 3.3 million. Later still, the reboot of *All Creatures Great and Small* did even better, with the first episode delivering a consolidated audience of 5 million. But is the best to come?

The man who commissions the broadcaster's drama is Sebastian Cardwell, deputy director of programmes for Channel 5's parent company, ViacomCBS Networks UK. He says: "Each programme has grown the audience more, so people are starting to equate Channel 5 with drama, which they wouldn't have done a couple of years ago.

"It's certainly more upmarket than when I joined the channel, when it

was acquisitions-heavy." Cardwell began his career at the BBC before moving to Channel 5.

He switched from acquisitions to become commissioning editor, then controller of digital channels, taking up his current position in February 2020. "I know the ins and outs of the channels and who does what and what works and what doesn't work – although every day you learn new things," he says.

The idea to move into original dramas stemmed from conversations with director of programmes Ben Frow. Despite the risk, they felt it was worth a shot, especially once their first steps into the area were successful (or at least, like 2019's four-parter *15 Days*, showed the genre's potential).

"We've seen that the dramas have punched above their weight compared with the other content," he says.

“Dramas are more expensive to make, but they score highly in terms of viewers, they get talked about, and they drive viewers to My5 as well, which, in this changing landscape of TV, is important to us.”

The move is bold, not only because of the cost but also because competition in this area is so stiff. Across 2020, eight of BBC iPlayer’s most-watched 10 programmes were dramas.

This January, ITV outdid itself as *The Pembrokeshire Murders* became its biggest drama in six years, and, in October, Sky Atlantic’s *The Undoing* launched to more viewers than the first season of *Game of Thrones*. It’s a tense battle, with as much jeopardy as the genre suggests.

Yet the devil is in the detail. Ask Cardwell what the biggest challenge of entering the market is, and he says it’s finding slots within the melee; he suggests one reason for *The Drowning’s* success was being scheduled on an otherwise-quiet Monday evening.

“The worst thing would be to spend all that time and money making a series, and then go up against an absolute beast of a show, a mega hit from one of our better-funded competitors,” he says. “That would be really disappointing.

“We’re a counter-scheduling channel. We know that there are certain competitors we can take on, and certain competitors we’ll be silly to take on.”

It helps that part of the strategy at Channel 5 is to set itself apart from the other UK public service broadcasters. This makes it easier to sign up the shows that are right for it.

Cardwell explains that the channel aims to work nimbly with production companies and so keep the process efficient. When needed, it shapes the show to make it exactly right for its heartland audience.

“Ben always talks about the audience as being a mother and daughter sitting on a couch in Middlesbrough who watch TV together,” says Cardwell. “I kind of agree with that. We know that we’re not metropolitan, we’re not cool, we’re not London.

“Our strategy from the start was to move into the domestic thriller space. Then, we have the returnables, the *All Creatures* stuff that we think is populist and will appeal to the Channel 5 viewer, and possibly beyond.”

Of the 10 or 11 original series it hopes to air each year (coronavirus willing, of course), a couple will be options “that push us into a slightly more differentiated direction”, he suggests. “It makes

us look forward-thinking and it’s good for press – which is important in drama.

“And we can’t just keep doing mystery thrillers. There’s nothing worse than dramas becoming homogenised and a bit boring. It’s about finding areas in scripted that we can move into, where we take those viewers and nudge them into another world.”

To that end, Channel 5 is keeping an eye out for more family sagas, literary adaptations and, given the knock-on effect of the pandemic, rags-to-riches



stories. “There are also stories of yesterday, like Lynda La Plante’s *Widows* and Hitchcock suspense, to take inspiration from.”

One much-anticipated curveball series is Jodie Turner-Smith, of *Queen & Slim* fame, playing the lead in *Anne Boleyn*, a thriller about the ill-fated queen. Though the casting is unconventional, Cardwell notes that it’s not a particularly risky move as the star carries her own profile, and *Anne Boleyn* has proven a popular subject for the channel.

“Inclusion and diversity is something we talk about a lot, not just in front of the camera, but behind the camera,” he says. “We have all sorts of initiatives going on at Channel 5. We’re encouraged, as commissioners, to work closely with our production companies to ensure we have diversity in all of our shows.

“Within drama, there’s one project in particular that I’m hoping to get off the ground in the next six months that could be a big leap forward, and an interesting way of looking at diversity

in a way that appeals to heartland audiences.”

As with most of the shows that he is working on, it’s still in development and at the mercy of the book-balancers. Though the amount that the channel spends per hour has changed little since Channel 5 was bought by Viacom in 2014, clearly more is being diverted into drama.

The broadcaster has had to become more creative to make that money go further, says Cardwell: “We use tax

credits where we can – we’re currently filming *Teacher* [about a schoolteacher accused of having sex with one of her pupils] in Hungary because the credits are double those of the UK.

“We’ve buddied up with Acorn [the British content streamer owned by AMC] for *Dalgliesh* [a new adaptation of PD James’s bestselling books], and *All Creatures Great and Small* was shown as part of PBS’s *Masterpiece* slot in the US.

“We’re very good at being economical, and we’re very successful at it in all the genres, because that’s just life at Channel 5.

“We don’t have the big budgets of our competitors, but we still make shows that compete and beat them. That’s what we do day in, day out.”

With *Intruder* earmarked as the next Channel 5 thriller to hit our screens – the story of a couple whose lives are turned upside down after a break-in, starring Elaine Cassidy (*No Offence*, *Fingersmith*) and Tom Meeten (*The Ghoul*) – the high drama at Channel 5 shows no sign of easing. ■

# Why French shows are so in vogue

**T**hrough the comedy-drama chic of *Call My Agent! (Dix Pour Cent)*, the down and dirty cop-show grit of *Spiral (Engrenages)*, the adventures of gentleman thief Assane Diop in *Lupin* or the political thrills and spills of *The Bureau*, international viewers are devouring subtitled French sass with gusto.

But this current crop of French hits does not share a formula or any commonality of genre or theme. “What the successful international French shows have in common is that they have nothing in common,” says Frédéric Pittoors d’Haveskercke, a Paris-based executive producer and go-to fixer, who helps European producers develop their international slates and development projects.

What they all share is being “absolutely, quintessentially French”, says Walter Iuzzolino of Walter Presents, the international TV drama partnership between Channel 4 and the acquisitions and distribution company Global Series Network. “The shows all have a funny, blasé, raucous sense of humour. And they don’t mind stabbing a cigarette in your hand if you irritate them,” he suggests.

Dominic Schreiber, SVP for co-productions and acquisitions at Newen Connect (the distribution arm of TF1 Group-owned Newen), agrees: “Even with the sound down and the subtitles off, you could look at a show such as *Call My Agent!* and know that it is French.” *Vive la différence*, then.

Sometimes, efforts to capture Frenchness have caused Gallic shrugs among subjects and audiences alike: *Emily in Paris*, a comedy-drama streaming series created by Darren Star, debuted on Netflix in October 2020. The show stars Lily Collins as an American who moves to Paris to work for a French marketing firm, and it was criticised for its stereotypical view of all things French.



**Stuart Kemp** explores why the UK is not alone in enjoying an *affaire du coeur* with French TV

BBC

“The berets. The croissants. The baguettes. The hostile waiters. The irascible concierges. The inveterate philanderers. The lovers and the mistresses. Name a cliché about France and the French, you’ll find it in *Emily in Paris*,” said French newspaper *20 Minutes*.

French television has come into its own as locked-down viewers across the globe have turned to their TVs in search of escapism. Many have latched on to French content across traditional broadcast channels, pay-TV and subscription streaming platforms.

*Call My Agent!* has been around for five years but the show’s fourth season is trending on Netflix, attracting plaudits and fresh attention in equal measure.

“The success is a combination of lockdown and being on Netflix. Word of mouth has just snowballed,” Schreiber notes. “One of the great things about these [online streaming] platforms is that audiences can stumble across these shows.”

Coupled with a growing comfort with subtitles, French shows are flourishing abroad. Long gone are the days when the French Alpine mystery drama *The Returned* (*Les Revenants*), produced by Haut et Court TV, was craftily marketed to Channel 4 audiences with images and no dialogue for its prime-time 9:00pm drama slot.

Tim Mutimer, EVP for sales and acquisitions, EMEA, at global distributor Banijay Rights, says the advent of Netflix, Amazon and Apple TV+ as co-production partners and distributors has bolstered the profile of French output. “Such platforms have taken non-English-language [content] to audiences around the world, so there is more of an appetite than there used to be.

“When you see the success of *Lupin* on Netflix... the fact is that something that isn’t filmed in English is not the barrier that, once upon a time, it would have been.”

Mutimer is promoting Banijay Studios France’s adaptation of Émile Zola’s novel *Germinal*, which could deliver a *Peaky Blinders* twist for France 2.

The arrival of the deep-pocketed streamers in France has opened up new possibilities for young writers, including those from diverse backgrounds, to develop their own projects, notes d’Haveskercke.

“Netflix and Amazon operate a little more carefully in the French market, because there are very specific ways of working [in France],” he explains.



Torn (*Souçons*) All 4

“It has not been as easy for Netflix to invest in the French market as it has been for the company in other European markets.”

Indeed, the slower migration to the small screen in France by the country’s producers is partly down to its protected cinema industry model, which subsidises independent film but does not assist TV.

But a combination of broadcasters and pay-TV operators raising their game to attract viewers and a growing demand from younger audiences for quality programmes delivered online is driving a cultural shift in attitudes.

“French film talent is flocking to TV,” argues Paris-based journalist, writer and broadcaster Agnes C Poirier. “From Cédric Klapisch directing *Call*

*My Agent!* to Pierre Salvadori behind the camera for *En thérapie*, TV series have earned a nobility and prestige they lacked before. For actors, the appeal is that the shows are often character-driven and therefore dramatically interesting, plus, on a purely practical level, the work is more stable than cinema.”

Iuzzolino adds: “French film-makers clocked it early – sometimes it is exciting to have a canvas where, instead of having to condense your story into 90 minutes, you can actually tell a story over several seasons.

“French creative talent is not glib about television – they are making art. They take their mission as writers, actors and DoPs very seriously and it shows.” >

## 'FRENCH CREATIVE TALENT IS NOT GLIB ABOUT TELEVISION – THEY ARE MAKING ART'

► French television political drama series *Spin*, starring film star Nathalie Baye and Grégory Fitoussi (of *Spiral* and *Mr Selfridge* fame) began life on France 2 before crossing la Manche, with three seasons rolling out on More4 between 2015 and 2017.

The seeds of love for French television, certainly for UK viewers, were planted by *Spiral*, which first aired on BBC Four in 2006. Created by Alexandra Clert and Guy-Patrick Sainderichin and produced by Son et Lumière, it garnered critical acclaim and a loyal audience of around 200,000 for the corporation long before Scandi noir became a genre phenomenon.

All eight series and 86 episodes of *Spiral* are available on BBC iPlayer. The show became Netflix's first subtitled show when the streamer snapped up non-exclusive rights to it in 2012; *Braquo*, distributed by Banijay, was another early runner, garnering two million viewers on Channel 4 in 2009.

There are plenty of other French gems on offer. Amazon Prime is home to *No Man's Land*, a drama about a man who travels to Syria, where Kurdish female soldiers battle Isis, to try and find his sister, who he believes has been declared dead in error. Produced by Haut et Court (producer of *les Revenants*), a second season of the Hulu co-production is likely.

Walter Presents boasts no fewer than 17 French shows. It is readying for the return of one of the platform's big hits, with the third season of *The Crimson Rivers* due this summer. Walter Presents also hosts the glossy, Provence-set drama *Torn*, a show that *The Guardian's* TV guru, Stuart Heritage, described recently as "perfect lockdown telly".

Iuzzolino and co created *Philharmonia*, a rollercoaster psychological thriller centering on a classical music conductor, her Parisian orchestra members and a dark secret she harbours. It is available on All 4 in the UK.

Such shows – "so French but at the



Call My Agent! (Dix pour cent)

Netflix

same time so fantastically international" – are front and centre of Iuzzolino's ambitions to curate a "sexy and exciting international drama space".

And there are many more ambitious French TV shows flirting with UK and international distribution deals. Federation Entertainment is selling the M6-commissioned *They Were Ten*, a contemporary adaptation of Agatha Christie's best-selling crime novel of all time. It is directed by Pascal Laugier, best known for hit thrillers *The Tall Man*, starring Jessica Biel, and *Incident in a Ghostland*, France's most successful film export of 2018.

Newen is pitching *HIP*, a police

procedural with a twist being made for TF1, about a police-station cleaning lady who discovers that she has "high intellectual potential" and begins working on police cases.

*L'Opera* is a Paris-set drama about the glamorous and merciless world of ballet dancers, produced for OCS, the Orange pay-TV platform, a smaller rival to Canal+. And buyers are jostling to secure the UK broadcast rights to Federation's glossy thriller *Time is a Killer*, set on Corsica and starring Mathilde Seigner, Caterina Murino, and Jenifer Bartoli alongside Fitoussi.

French television is certainly on an upward spiral. ■



India vs England second Test, 2021

BCCI/Pankaj Nangia

# A cagey game for rights

**T**he topsy-turvy Test series in India is bringing much-needed entertainment – though, latterly, little cheer for England fans – during lockdown. When time is hard to fill, what could be better than six hours plus of cricket a day shown on free-to-air TV.

There were many raised eyebrows when Channel 4 bought the rights to the four-Test series. Why would a channel that prides itself on risk-taking and a young demographic clear its morning schedules for a game with an elderly and declining fan base?

In fact, restoring live Test cricket to terrestrial TV has proved a ratings hit. Nearly 6 million viewers watched England's progress to a thumping win in the first Test, with many tuning in, bleary-eyed, from the very first ball at 4:00am. And not all the viewers were

As cricket returns to free-to-air TV, **Matthew Bell** checks out the bidders eyeing other top sports rights

oldies: across the five days, 10% were under 16 and 13% aged 16 to 34. It's a pity for Channel 4 that England couldn't drag out their defeat any longer than two days in the third Test.

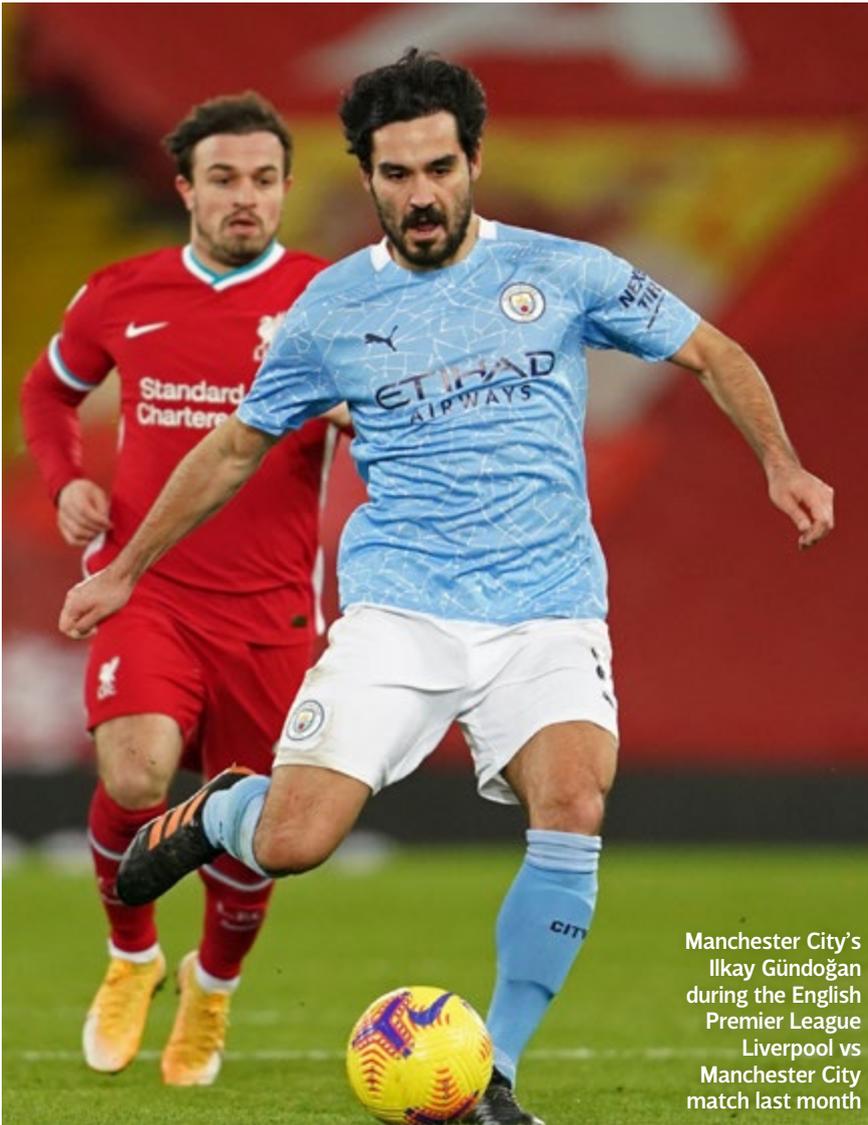
But was Channel 4's coup an isolated triumph or are there more opportunities for terrestrial TV to pick up sports rights?

"This is a bit of a one-off," reckons Enders Analysis senior TV analyst Julian Aquilina. Sky Sports, which holds the rights for England's home Tests until 2024, remains cricket's

dominant broadcaster. "A free-to-air broadcaster got its hands on the rights because pay-TV broadcasters didn't think they were that valuable," he suggests.

"Sky has learnt that it isn't necessary to have everything – it can hang on to pretty much all its sports subscribers as long as it has, by some distance, the best sports proposition in the market," says former Sky COO Mike Darcey. "If you're a sports fan, you get Sky first and then ask if you need anything else. That's why Sky is quite happy to step away from England Test matches in India. Is anyone going to churn? No."

Illustrating Darcey's point, at the end of last month, Sky snapped up the rights to the T20 internationals and the one-day series, which follow the Test series. Short-form cricket puts more bums on sofas – Sky wasn't >



Manchester City's Ilkay Gündoğan during the English Premier League Liverpool vs Manchester City match last month

## 'BT AND SKY'S OVERARCHING STRATEGY... IS TO CUT BACK ON THEIR SPORTS-RIGHTS SPEND'

domestic TV rights fell by almost 5%, while France's Ligue 1's deal with Barcelona-based media group Mediapro collapsed. It has recently signed a stop-gap deal with Canal+, but it is thought that the French league will lose close to 50% of its TV income this season.

For the Premier League, UK rights will probably go down 5% to 8%, "but it wouldn't surprise us if it was 10%", says Alexios Dimitropoulos, a senior analyst at Ampere Analysis.

Auctions need aggressive bidders and, since Sky and BT ended their long-running dispute over carrying each other's channels in 2017, competition has been lacking. "The only real competitive pressure there's been in the market for some time has been Sky versus BT and that has gone because of the cross-supply deal," says Darcey. "That's why the prices went down last time. They're both content with what they've got and they will both see an opportunity to bank a saving."

Aquilina adds: "Sky and BT already have very expensive sports portfolios. The overarching strategy at these two companies is to cut back on their sports-rights spend."

Will any new bidders enter the auction? The consensus is that Amazon will be content to stick with its current package of 20 live games bookending Christmas, which has encouraged soccer fans to join Amazon Prime.

Says Darcey: "It's a minor package, which happens to work for Amazon very well. It's a very big leap from there to contesting the major packs of Sky and BT. There's not zero chance of that, but it's quite a low chance. And the chances of anyone else seem lower still. The likes of Netflix and Apple haven't shown any signs of getting serious about sport."

Aquilina says that even a fall of 10% to 15% in the price of Premier League rights "would not be surprising", adding: "Sport is not a good fit for most streamers. Netflix and Disney are video entertainment platforms in the UK... sports

› going to allow these valuable rights to fall into the lap of a free-to-air broadcaster.

Sports without the mass appeal of football, such as cricket, face a tricky choice: greater exposure on terrestrial TV but less money; or bigger bucks but smaller pay-TV audiences.

Sky's cricket coverage has been exemplary and has filled cricket's coffers, but it has come at a cost – the game's grassroots have withered.

Talking at an RTS event late last year, Sunset+Vine Chair Jeff Foulser, whose company produced Channel 4's coverage of the 2005 Ashes – the last time live Test cricket aired on terrestrial TV before now – said: "This is no criticism of Sky, but not everyone can afford to have a subscription. Cricket has suffered in the intervening years because it wasn't available to as many eyeballs as possible. All sport needs terrestrial television."

Cricket is trying to recalibrate its coverage: Sky will continue to broadcast home Tests, but the BBC has highlights packages and will show some live T20 internationals.

Football is a different matter. Premier League rights are up for grabs again and, outside the highlights package, cash-strapped free-to-air TV again won't get a look in. The last auction, in 2018, saw domestic rights sell for £4.5bn over three years – a fall from 2015's peak of £5.1bn – to Sky as the major broadcaster; BT Sport as the second player; and Amazon, the junior partner.

The years of galloping inflation that saw rights rise from £1.8bn in 2009 to £3bn in 2012 are over. If recent deals in major European leagues are any guide, the current bidding for UK rights for the Premier League will not reach the 2018 figure.

Last year, Germany's Bundesliga



England vs Wales, Six Nations rugby union, last month

Welsh Rugby Union

rights have limited or even zero shelf lives – people want to watch the game live, whereas scripted drama can be watched over and over again.

“Sports rights typically also get sold to a domestic market and that doesn’t play to the advantages of these global players.”

There has been speculation that fast-rising sports streamer DAZN could bid, but nothing can happen until the Premier League issues its tender document which, in years past, would have been released by now.

Premier League CEO Richard Masters recently said: “We are in no rush.... It is too early to say whether there will be any material deviation from our historic packaging strategies.”

Darcey thinks the Premier League could change the packaging structure to “try to tempt in another player or generally disrupt the sale of the rights. At the very least, you want uncertainty – if bidders are uncertain what’s going on, they sometimes manage their fear by putting more money on the table.”

Rugby union’s Six Nations rights are also due for renewal. Never has sport had a more captive audience than

## ‘IF YOU’RE A SPORTS FAN, YOU GET SKY FIRST AND THEN ASK IF YOU NEED ANYTHING ELSE’

during lockdown – the England vs Scotland clash on ITV (which shares coverage with the BBC) recorded a peak audience of 8.7 million last month, the biggest in more than a decade for the Calcutta Cup.

Unfortunately for union fans, the Six Nations is not a category-A listed event. This guarantees that certain high-profile sports events, including the finals of the FA Cup and Wimbledon, are available on free-to-air TV.

Worse, to dig itself out of a Covid-19 financial hole, the Six Nations is set to sell private equity firm CVC Capital a 14.5% stake in its commercial rights. Dimitropoulos reckons that CVC will want “to push for higher TV revenues

and that would mean it’s very likely to go partly behind a paywall. My feeling is that this will be part paywall, part free-to-air.”

During CVC’s involvement with Formula One, from 2006 to 2017, coverage moved to pay-TV and income was maximised, but many fans felt this was at the expense of the sport’s soul.

Since CVC sold F1 to Liberty Media for \$4.4bn, more than doubling its investment, it has acquired stakes in two rugby competitions, the English Premiership and Celtic Pro14. Football could be next, with CVC currently negotiating for a stake in Italian league Serie A’s media rights.

Banker and sports specialist Keith Harris, speaking at a SportBusiness webinar last month, said: “If it could be done in Formula One, it could be done in another money-spinning sport, which is obviously football.”

With football leagues around Europe increasingly anxious about a decline in TV revenues, will they, too, turn to private equity money to plug the gap? And will this lead then to even greater commercialisation of the people’s game? ■

# At the Sharp end

The BBC's new Chair, **Richard Sharp**, the former Goldman Sachs banker helping to steer the BBC through challenging times, is profiled by Steve Clarke

**T**here is already something of a buzz around Richard Sharp, the new BBC Chair, and about what he and Director-General Tim Davie might achieve together as they navigate the corporation towards what we all hope is a post-Covid world.

Inevitably, not everyone at the BBC was pleased that another money man was chosen as successor to Sir David Clementi – himself a former deputy governor of the Bank of England. But many across the TV sector were relieved that a more controversial candidate was not appointed.

"I genuinely welcome Richard Sharp's appointment," says Sir Peter Bazalgette, ITV's Chair. "It is a very good appointment for the BBC."

This kind of enthusiasm for Sharp, who started his new job last month, is not difficult to find within TV, not least because the new Chair was pivotal in helping to secure the Treasury's creative industries relief package, the £1.57bn Culture Recovery Fund, so important to helping at least some TV freelancers keep their heads above water during the past year.

Pact CEO John McVay, who was fundamental to brokering the deal, says: "Excuse the pun but Sharp by name, sharp by nature. He asked me



PA **Richard Sharp**

what was the one thing stopping production restarting? I said insurance. We've got everything ready to go but we can't switch on the cameras again because no one will insure us.

"Because we can't get insurance, no one will invest. He doesn't understand how production works, but he got it and took me to task with some very tough questioning."

McVay adds: "He's very acute, inquiring and will bring a powerful intellect to the BBC at a time when it

needs to think quite profoundly about its future."

Others, too, draw attention to Sharp's intellect, a lightning-quick mind, and a staccato way of speaking that resembles machine-gun fire.

Following his encounter with McVay, Sharp then opened the door for Pact to Rishi Sunak – the Chancellor had worked for Sharp at Goldman Sachs and brought him in as an adviser to the Treasury last spring during the first lockdown.

“At the time, several broadcasters contacted him to ask his advice about things such as bank loans,” says an old friend. “This was long before anyone mentioned him as a potential BBC Chair. He was more than willing to offer his help.”

This praise for Sharp is not shared by the Labour Party. Alastair Campbell, Tony Blair’s former spin doctor, has tweeted: “So the march to the moneyed right goes on apace. New BBC Chair super-wealthy ex-Goldman Sachs boss of, and lately assistant to, Sunak. The anti-public service contingent really are getting all their people in on the inside now.” However, Blair’s Government appointed millionaire economist Gavyn Davies, another Goldman Sachs high-flyer, as BBC Chair.

On paper, Sharp’s establishment credentials are abundant: the son of a successful businessman who was later elevated to the House of Lords, privately educated and who, after reading PPE at Oxford, spent more than 30 years in investment banking. He sat on Boris Johnson’s board of economic advisors when Johnson was London mayor.

Sharp has reportedly donated more than £400,000 to the Conservative Party since 2001 and was on the board of the Centre for Policy Studies, a centre-right think tank. He has said that he will donate his £160,000 BBC salary to charity.

However, this background doesn’t tell the whole story. “Richard’s got quite a lot of non-establishment instincts. That makes him very different to David Clementi, who is establishment through and through,” says someone who knows him well. “He will be much more difficult for the great leviathan that is the BBC to capture than some of his predecessors. Richard can be quite a handful.”

Nevertheless, Sharp brings to the BBC a direct route into the heart of the Government. “The Government has appointed their appointee to run the BBC,” says Bazalgette. “He is the best person to get a reasonable deal on funding out of the Government.”

In the light of the recent shake-up of personnel at No 10, there is more optimism that the BBC can build on its achievements during the pandemic without having to deal with too many hand grenades from Downing Street.

The BBC needs to take urgent action to make more than £400m-worth of cuts that are due within a year. Simultaneously, it also needs to deflect any blowback as it extracts itself from a former commitment to pay the TV licences of all over-75s. In this context, Sharp’s commercial acumen should prove useful.

When Sharp was grilled by the Commons’ Digital, Culture, Media and

‘I THINK I WON THE LOTTERY IN LIFE TO BE BRITISH AND, IF I CAN MAKE A CONTRIBUTION, I COULDN’T BE HAPPIER TO’

Sport Committee in January, he said that the licence fee was “the least worst” way of funding the BBC. He said he had an “open mind” about how the corporation should be funded in the future, and that it “may be worth reassessing” the current system. “At 43p a day, the BBC represents terrific value,” Sharp told MPs.

“Judged by his performance at the select committee, Richard clearly believes in the BBC, although it will have many reforms made to it in the next five to 10 years,” opines Bazalgette.

“We’re all a product of our upbringing and I was very fortunate with the parents I have; my great-grandparents came to this country escaping tyranny,” Sharp recalled at the select committee hearing. “I think I won the lottery in life to be British and, if I can make a contribution, I couldn’t be happier to.

“The BBC is part of all our identities, of all our national identities and offers education and enrichment and is also important for our position in the world... It is a massive privilege to be Chair of the BBC.”

The new Chair’s cultural hinterland – he was Chair of the Royal Academy from 2007 to 2012 and co-founded the charity London Music Masters – is another factor that makes him well qualified for the job.

Jean Seaton, author of a volume of the official history of the BBC, says: “He has a background, and a real and vivid interest, in music, and must have demonstrated during the interview process a real hunger for a whole variety of content. To me, that’s the key.”

During the select committee hearing, the new Chair said he “inhales” BBC drama, highlighting *Fleabag* and *Roadkill*.

On the sensitive topic of diversity, there are those who think that having two Oxbridge-educated white men over 50 once again running the BBC is deeply anachronistic. Seaton, however, thinks Sharp and Davie have an opportunity to redress the balance by introducing some fresh, diverse talent to strengthen the BBC Board.

“Six members of the board are about to be replaced,” she says. “Provided he’s wise, he will be very active in composing the board so that it genuinely represents the variety of modern Britain. If you look at Davie’s targets on diversity, they’re both ambitious and realistic.”

Another BBC watcher says: “I think he’s going to shake up the board and hire some media gurus.”

What, then, of the critical question of how Davie and Sharp are likely to work together? Both possess keen commercial brains and will think creatively and imaginatively about future international initiatives beyond the BBC’s core UK public service activities. More partnerships and clever ideas may well be on the horizon.

“Sharp will be a good fit with Tim,” says a former BBC DG. “They have a lot in common.”

“They are both straight-talking guys,” says McVay. “I imagine they’ll have some robust conversations. That’s a good thing. For the BBC to survive, some profound, robust conversations are needed.”

As for the inevitable BBC crises that will involve Sharp in his new role, Seaton thinks it will mostly be water off a duck’s back. “Sharp looks like someone who thinks he’s going to enjoy himself at the BBC,” she says. “He will be unfazed by the BBC scandals that always emerge sooner or later.

“They won’t bother him. He doesn’t have that vulnerability that certain politicians have. Bankers don’t have that kind of personality. He’s a master of the universe.” ■

# Where are all the disabled people?

**Rosie Jones** and **Deborah Williams** discuss television's failure to hire more disabled people

If you want some light reading, please do not dip into the Creative Diversity Network's recent report, "Diamond: The Fourth Cut". The statistics are grim, particularly when it comes to disability. According to the report, the UK TV industry has "urgent" work to do on disability representation, both on- and off-screen. This is an understatement of monumental proportions.

As a disabled person who has been working in the TV industry for 10 years, straddling both sides of the camera, I am not surprised by this report. I am almost always the lone ranger, working in an environment with not a single fellow disabled person in sight.

I started working as a TV researcher in 2011 at one of the biggest production companies in the country. Despite there being well over 100 employees at the company, I was the only disabled person working there. This picture continued throughout my time in production.

The stats in the report support my own experiences in production. In the last year covered, disabled people made up just 5.8% of off-screen contributions, well below the national workforce estimate, which is 17%.

While there are several different, and brilliant, diversity schemes in TV production, these are still too few and far between. And once we start talking about disability representation in senior roles – well, we can't start talking about that, because there simply aren't any disabled people in senior roles in television.

The on-screen representation of disabled people is also shockingly low, accounting for just 8.2% of contributions. As a comedian who appears on panel shows and comedy programmes regularly, I can't remember a single time where I've appeared with another



Rosie Jones

'I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY WE'RE IGNORING A FIFTH OF OUR COUNTRY'

# Fragile gains are at grave risk

disabled person... oh, apart from on *The Last Leg*, obviously!

I don't understand why we're ignoring a fifth of our country. When it comes to TV, people with disabilities are purposely overlooked and ignored. And, let me tell you, as a disabled person, that this has a crushing impact not just on society's opinion of us, but on how we perceive ourselves.

When I was growing up, I never saw anyone like me on television. Despite being a fiercely independent and strong-willed kid, I started to feel invalid and unworthy because people "like me" were never shown to be just like everyone else.

On the few occasions when disabled people were on TV, it was to play the victim or the angelic creature... and those were things that I could never relate to. Sure, I'm disabled, but I am not a victim and, my God, I am certainly not an angelic creature.

How disabled people are perceived has also had a damning effect on society as a whole. On a daily basis, I am still mocked, patronised and underestimated.

Very few of these instances could be described as "malicious" – I believe that they come from a lack of understanding and education.

If there were more representation of disability on TV, there would be less of a sense of "the other" when a non-disabled person meets a disabled person in real life.

Having more disabled people on- and off-screen must happen... now! If you carry on ignoring a huge chunk of our world, you will alienate us and only widen the gap between the different sectors in society, and no one wants that – do they?

How could choosing to celebrate how wonderfully diverse our country is ever be a bad thing? By embracing minorities, we are able to tell more interesting and richer stories through television.

We can educate, entertain, and all become better people, working in an industry that is a true representation of the beautiful world we live in. Now is our time. ■

*Rosie Jones is a comedian.*

It is impossible to put into words what it has been like this last year, living and working as a disabled person in British television. I can't begin to share the levels of distress and depression that I have experienced myself and have had expressed to me by other people.

From a Creative Diversity Network perspective, 2020 should have been the conclusion of our Doubling Disability programme, launched in 2017. It was clear from the first report, 2017's 'Diamond: The First Cut' – even though it was based on limited data – that, on- and off-screen, disabled people were shockingly under-represented in TV.

That did not mean that there were no disabled people working in TV and that progress hadn't been made. However, if you look at the UK as a whole, around 17% of the workforce is disabled. Diamond revealed that, in television, disabled people comprised no more than 5% of employees.

We commissioned additional research, from which came Doubling Disability, a commitment to double the percentage of disabled people in off-screen roles by the end of 2020. The target was 9%. We even got the Department for Work and Pensions on board. We were in an incredibly positive and powerful place.

The approach was two-tiered: first, there was the indirect impact involving cultural change and discussion of what the industry needed to do to bring this about.

The second level concerned how Diamond could help monitor the changes and how broadcasters would develop projects that backed disabled talent in areas such as writing and directing and employ disabled people in all areas of production.

At the end of 2019, some broadcasters announced what they were committed to doing. For instance, Channel 4

was looking forward to extending its Paralympics production training programme.

Then the pandemic hit. Across TV, production was halted. Our initiatives were stopped dead in their tracks. In the past year, what progress we had seen was rolled backwards.

Disabled people have told us that they are not being contracted: as freelancers, they are especially vulnerable in the age of Covid. We've been told that they are an insurance risk – or perceived to be – due to the high cost of insuring them. Our fourth report, published in January was emphatic: the UK television industry has 'urgent' work to do on disability. We found that disabled people

are only making 5.8% of contributions off-screen and 8.2% on-screen. These were meagre gains on 2019; overall, there is 'significant' under-representation across senior production roles.

The pandemic is being used as an excuse to roll the clock back 30 years, which is just shocking. We must not allow this to happen.

What we must do this year is pick up the baton from Alison Walsh, the former pan-BBC disability lead and disability executive at Channel 4. Her leadership and determination gave disabled people hope. Alison is the Don of this space.

No one has come close to her. As an industry, we need to take her example and carry on and complete the race in style. There is much work to be done. We've got to fix disability in the industry.

We cannot allow people to arbitrarily assume they know what a disabled person is capable of by just being introduced to them; we cannot allow a mediocre representation of disabled talent, on- or off-screen.

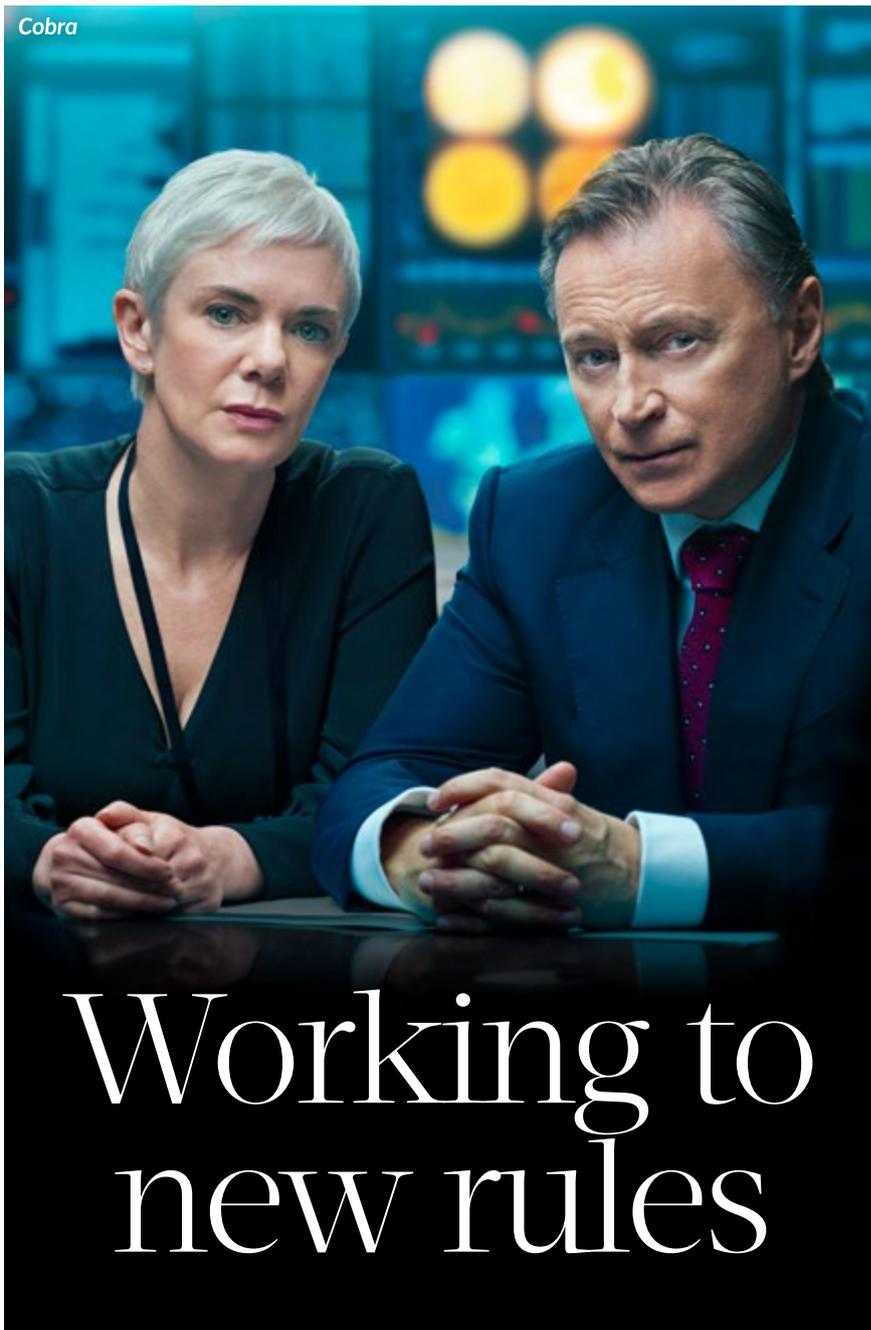
It needs sorting, and we are in a unique position now to fix it. ■

**Deborah Williams is executive director of the Creative Diversity Network.**



Paul Hampartsoumian

Cobra



As Covid-19 supervisors become commonplace on set, **Tim Dams** learns how producers are keeping the cameras rolling

**T**he show must go on” runs the showbiz saying, but even this old cliché has been turned on its head by the Covid-19 pandemic. Numerous dramas have temporarily halted production in recent months following Covid outbreaks among cast or crew. Sky thriller *Cobra*, for example, started shooting its second season at the end of September, but returned from the Christmas break to find that 15 of its cast and crew had tested positive for Covid.

Meanwhile, the third season of *Britannia* has just wrapped, nearly a year after it first went into production, in March 2020. The Sky original closed down two weeks later due to the first lockdown, then restarted in September but had to halt for a week amid positive Covid tests.

Other productions have delayed shooting during the winter’s horrifying second Covid-19 wave. *Conversations with Friends*, the BBC follow-up to its hit Sally Rooney adaptation, *Normal People*, pushed production from January to spring. Channel 5 and Acorn TV detective drama *Dalgliesh* moved from January to March.

Charlie Pattinson, CEO of *Cobra* and *Dalgliesh* producer New Pictures, says it has been important to display

“ultra-caution” over production during the pandemic. “The show business ethos that, whatever happens, the show must go on, and you just struggle on, no longer applies.”

Programme-makers say that the industry’s Covid safe-shooting protocols, agreed last summer, in combination with the Government-backed £500m Film and TV Production Restart Scheme, have been key to restarting production.

What began as a trickle last summer has become something of a flood. So far, more than 160 productions across the UK have been approved by the Restart scheme, which has been

extended to cover productions that start shooting before the end of April.

Pattinson describes the scheme as a “vital safety blanket”, albeit an expensive one. “It’s also quite unwieldy. We’re not planning on making a claim under it, despite the fact we have lost a couple of days.”

He says that a “rigid adherence” to the Covid production protocols has been important for keeping people not just physically safe, but also in good mental health.

Cast and crew rightly felt “very fragile” around the New Year, when hospitalisations and deaths were peaking. “What people want to know is that we

Sky



On the set of *Temple*

Sky

have their best interests at heart – that their health takes precedence over our schedule.”

Among all the Covid protocols, producers say regular testing has been critical to ensuring a smooth filming schedule, and to allaying the worries of cast and crew.

*Conversations with Friends* indie Element Pictures, for example, is one of several productions to have its own, fast-turnaround coronavirus testing lab on-site. “We’re definitely erring on the side of caution,” says Element co-founder Ed Guiney.

A Covid-19 supervisor has also become a familiar presence on sets to oversee safety precautions.

All high-end dramas need to have a Covid-19 supervisor. They carry out risk assessments with the health and safety manager and on-site medic, oversee the implementation and monitoring of Covid-19 safety controls, and have the authority to stop unsafe working practices.

Covid-19 supervisors might come from a dedicated health and safety background or be a trained crew member who then works in a dual role. To help meet demand for Covid supervisors, the Production Guild of Great Britain (PGGB) and the British Film Commission (BFC) partnered last

## ‘MANY PRODUCTION COMPANIES CITE A 15% TO 30% RISE IN COSTS’

year to develop a new programme of Covid supervisor training for film and TV, targeted at production managers, line producers and location managers.

“It’s a full-time job,” says Kenton Allen, CEO of Big Talk, which is currently shooting Stephen Merchant’s *The Offenders* in Bristol for BBC One and Amazon Prime Video.

Like many other executives, Allen is unable to visit the set of his own show. “They’re running a Covid-secure environment. Jumping on a train to Bristol and going on set is a no-no, I’m afraid. One needs to lead by example, and that would be setting a bad example.”

However, a Covid supervisor gives people such as Allen “the confidence that it is all being done correctly to support the producers – it is essential”.

Indeed, complex Covid safety protocols now reach into every corner of production, including: twice-weekly PCR testing for all working within

close-contact bubbles; limiting the numbers on set; crew working two metres apart; departments split into smaller sections; and the ubiquitous mask wearing, extra washing and sanitisation facilities.

Inevitably, Covid has also made production itself more complex. Big Talk, for example, has built more sets for *The Offenders* at Bristol’s Bottle Yard Studios to give production more “controllable environments”, explains Allen.

Element has also built more sets in Belfast for *Conversations with Friends*. “We’re shooting on an awful lot of stages,” confirms Guiney.

Not only does this make it easier for a production to adhere to Covid guidelines, it also means that a shoot can keep away from the public.

It’s still very challenging to be out on the streets with a crew, particularly in residential areas, says Allen. “Crew are having to deal with, on occasions, some quite reactionary behaviour from members of the public,” he explains.

Studios also give productions more shooting flexibility if a location suddenly become unavailable, as happened to *Cobra*. It lost a major location – a seafront town in the North West – early on in production. The local council, says Pattinson, was so occupied with dealing with Covid that it, understandably, >



Wrangling extras on *The Offenders*

John Myers

› “couldn’t get its head around 20 or 30 people coming in to film”.

International travel has been the other big headache. Few have opted to shoot abroad in recent months, with notable exceptions including *Around the World in 80 Days*, starring David Tennant, which restarted filming in November in Romania and completed in South Africa this year.

“International filming is difficult,” agrees one producer. “I know people who are shooting in Budapest at the moment. It’s pretty unpleasant – everyone is locked up in their hotel room for most of the time.”

Even transporting international talent to the UK is difficult, and expensive. *Big Talk*, for example, is flying *The Offenders* star Christopher Walken by private jet, rather than using a commercial airline, from New York to the UK for the shoot, after which he will isolate and be tested ahead of filming. “We have a duty of care to an extremely brilliant actor to get him here in as safe a way as possible,” Allen explains.

For those international stars who do make it here, there are still challenges, though. *Cobra* star Robert Carlyle – who lives in Vancouver, Canada – flew over ahead of production in September. He was unable to return

home to his family over Christmas during a two-week break because he would have had to quarantine on the way out and the way back. He spent Christmas on his own.

“He’s been amazing,” says Pattinson. “But whether he’d do that again, I don’t know.”

Asked if there is anything about making TV shows in Covid times that programme-makers would like to adopt for the future, few can identify any positives. “The shooting process has been pretty well designed over the past 70 to 80 years,” says Allen. “I don’t think Covid has taught us anything we’d like to carry on in the future.”

Covid restrictions have added to the time and expense of production, note production companies, with many citing a 15% to 30% rise in

costs. The social distancing and mask wearing “also take quite a lot of the fun out of it”, says James Richardson, co-founder of *Britannia* producer Vertigo Films. Having steered *Britannia* through nearly a year of Covid-interrupted production, his advice for producers is: “Don’t be daunted by it.” Everything that producers do is about solving problems, he says.

Richardson had two guiding parameters for *Britannia*: could the cast and crew still do their best work? Was everyone safe? “If the answer to those two questions was yes, then I felt we could carry on going.”

Looking ahead, most producers are optimistic about the coming months, predicting buoyant levels of production as the vaccination programme accelerates and social-distancing measures ease. “I don’t feel that these protocols are going to go away quickly,” says Pattinson. “But I feel as though it’s got to get better.”

It can hardly get more difficult than shooting during January, at the peak of the pandemic, when one in 50 people had Covid-19 in the UK. “The industry has been pretty amazing working through this,” says Pattinson. “I don’t think you can underestimate the anxiety levels. People were incredibly brave.” ■

**‘DON’T BE DAUNTED... EVERYTHING PRODUCERS DO IS ABOUT SOLVING PROBLEMS’**

# OUR FRIEND IN YORKSHIRE

**R**obson Green has done it. Professor Alice Roberts has also given it a go. Darcey Bussell tried it in Scotland recently. Kate

Humble did it naked. Susannah Constantine took an axe with her when she did it. Barely a week goes by without someone from either *Countryfile* or *The One Show* doing it. And Port Talbot resident David Bryan credits it with helping to save his life.

I'm talking wild or – as I prefer to call it – cold-water swimming. It's something that I, along with hundreds of thousands of other people, took up last year as a way of coping with lockdown. And it's something that seems to have taken over our TV screens and my life in equal measure!

I've always enjoyed the odd dip in a lake, but I started swimming outdoors on a more regular basis last summer. Why? Because it was something that would provide some much-needed exercise and it was one of the few things that I was permitted to do with a friend or two. So, when a mate suggested it, it was an easy "yes" in a summer of "nos/can'ts" – although I honestly didn't think it would last, and I certainly had no idea just how much it would get under my skin.

The water felt cold that first summer's day. In fact, it was 16°C, which, I've since learned, is fairly warm as things go. After every aquatic trip, I would say wistfully to my companion, "Well, that'll probably be the last one until next year because it'll be too cold next week". But here's the thing. Water takes longer than air to cool down, so the temperature difference

**Katy Boulton**  
shares her  
new obsession  
and invites a  
commissioner to  
dip their toe in very  
cold water



Katy Boulton

from one week to the next is relatively small. If you just keep on swimming regularly, you adjust to the cold, bit by bit, over time. Then, one day, you find yourself swimming in 4°C water, with snow falling around you (surreal but magical). And you confidently tell your friend in a Mr Toadish kind of a way, "I'm going to carry on doing this for ever!"

Other reasons for me to continue include: regular mid-swim sightings of a kingfisher; a definite (and much needed) mental health lift; the fact that it allows me to meet with a friend or two within the various rules and restrictions; the beautiful countryside (I live in the South Pennines); the connection with the changing seasons;

the laughter (believe me – when you flash your backside at the fishermen for the umpteenth time while getting changed, you and your friends will howl with laughter); and, of course, the post-swim cake (medicinal purposes only, you understand).

It seems I'm very much not alone, and we can see the evidence of the nation's new-found obsession with cold-water swimming all over our screens. Robson Green first went on his *Wild Swimming Adventure* (ITV) in 2009. The two-parter has since been re-released on Amazon Prime Video, reflecting current interest.

Last summer, we saw Roberts embark on a quest to discover what lies behind the UK's lockdown craze in her BBC Four documentary *Wild Swimming with Alice Roberts*. And, just last month, we've had True North's *Wild Coasts of Scotland* series for More4, in which Darcey Bussell went wild swimming off the Isle of Skye. And, of course, these are just a handful among many other programmes and features.

My new obsession is a campaign to create a lido in my local community. So, if there are any commissioning editors out there, I reckon the journey from idea to reality would make a great documentary series.

Or how about a TV travelogue of Britain's lidos, exploring our many and varied outdoor pools? I'd watch it, for sure, and I'm certain I wouldn't be the only one! ■

**Katy Boulton is strategic development manager at TripleC/DANC (Disabled Artists Networking Community), which campaigns for representation and opportunities for disabled people on and off our screens.**

**G**race was shot under stringent coronavirus protocols but you would never know an epidemic was sweeping the nation from watching

ITV's new Sunday-night drama. This was as the broadcaster and the show's producer intended – and immensely pleasing for its star, John Simm. “No one wants to see anything about Covid. It was the most depressingly boring year and we don't want to see it on film,” he says.

Simm plays detective superintendent Roy Grace, the eponymous hero of Peter James's bestselling crime novels.

The actor hadn't read a Grace novel before being offered the part. “It's not a genre I would read normally,” he admits. “I devoured the first three very quickly and I was absolutely hooked. I'm on book 10 at the moment.”

Grace can use strange methods, including consulting a medium, but, says Simm, “he's not maverick – he's just a really good police officer”.

“In today's police world, maverick cops don't have a place,” says James. “In so many television dramas, you see the senior cop being bolshie and shouting at people.

“I've been going out with the police on my research for well over 30 years and the really good ones are not shouty – they're calm, methodical and actually very kind. I look at John on television and he is completely that.”

Brighton, where the novels are set, offers James scope for his imagination to run wild. “Graham Greene has been the only writer who really understood its dark heart. I was born and grew up in Brighton and, as a kid in the 1950s and 1960s, it was a dark, dangerous and seedy place.”

Now, he admits, “it's one of the coolest places in England”, but the criminals never left. “It's really fertile ground for me.”

James classes himself a thriller writer, not an author of murder mysteries: “The classic British whodunnit starts with a body on page one and the rest of the novel is a puzzle to solve it, whereas I like to have the victim alive but in peril at the end of chapter one.”

There have been three previous adaptations of Grace novels, all of which James dismisses as “lame”. He has rejected other proposals, including an odd BBC Scotland proposal to relocate Roy and his team to Aberdeen.

For this latest adaptation, he turned

# Sleuthing by the sea

Could a contemporary thriller set in Brighton and starring John Simm become ITV's new *Inspector Morse*? **Matthew Bell** investigates



ITV John Simm as Roy Grace

to an old friend, actor-turned-producer Andrew O'Connor, the co-founder of Second Act Productions. "He's somebody I completely trust and who's always been a fan of my work."

James passed on adapting his own work: "The average Roy Grace novel is 120,000 words; a script is 20,000 and you're writing in a very different way. I felt it would be better to let somebody else have it."

O'Connor approached his old friend Russell Lewis, the creator of *Inspector Morse* prequel *Endeavour* and writer of countless episodes of *Morse*, *Lewis*, *Kavanagh QC* and *Sharpe*. Lewis and O'Connor were child actors and met at acting school in the 1970s.

Lewis is a busy man, performing the herculean task of penning all 30 episodes of *Endeavour* over the past nine years – but he found the time to adapt the first two Grace novels.

As well as writing 40-plus books, James has produced films and TV shows, enduring "writers with egos the size of planets – and bigger". He says Lewis couldn't be more different: "Russ has no ego. He is a genuinely warm, funny, bright guy. He's been incredibly respectful, and he didn't need to be, as he's had an amazing career himself. He's not changed anything without discussing it with me."

Lewis talks as warmly about James: "It was a real privilege for me – the guy's a ledge. Peter was amazingly supportive throughout.

"Peter's written for the screen before, so he knows that what you can do in a book sometimes doesn't work the same way on screen. He was completely open to me expanding and developing what was in the novel."

Over the years, Lewis has put the works of PD James, Bernard Cornwell, Agatha Christie and Colin Dexter on screen, and says the same rules apply to all adaptations: "You want to do right by them and by their creation."

Production on *Grace* began early last year from a base at Brighton Racecourse, abruptly stopped as the country went into lockdown and then restarted in early autumn.

"We were one of the first dramas to go back into production," recalls Paul Sandler, who founded Second Act Productions with O'Connor: "The whole team really pulled together and worked under very difficult and stringent conditions."

None of the executive producers, who also number James, Lewis and

Patrick Schweitzer from Tall Story Pictures, made it on to the set.

"Everything had to be done from a distance or not done at all," says Sandler.

O'Connor recalls: "We couldn't get to hang out with the actors – that's the best bit, right? There's no point in making drama if you can't hang out with the stars."

The Covid-19 rules raised the stress levels of the cast. Richie Campbell, who plays Roy Grace's partner, detective sergeant Glenn Branson, recalls: "I was so nervous. I like a hands-on approach [to acting]... a bit touchy-feely, so to speak, but as [everything] was stripped back, I was wondering if

*Dead Simple* features a scene of psychological horror this viewer found almost impossible to watch. This pleases Lewis: "It worked as we meant it to, then." But there are limits to what dramas can portray in primetime. "Peter's stories are so deliciously dark," says executive producer Patrick Schweitzer. "While we haven't been able to go full on with the blood and guts because of the compliance issues you face with a family [viewing] slot, I think it's a defining aspect of the show that it has darker subject matter and challenging cases."

Despite the odd grisly scene, could *Grace* give ITV another *Inspector Morse*?



we would be able to create what we [wanted] on screen."

In the event, the actors coped and then flourished until working within the protocols become "second nature", says Campbell. Rakie Ayola, who plays assistant chief constable Alison Vosper, adds: "You get beyond the strangeness."

"I was so happy to see Rakie in that role," says Campbell, who, like Ayola, is black and part of a diverse cast. "But it was also because I knew she was good for that role; they hadn't just shoe-horned her in. *Grace* is a very modern show and a good representation of the country."

"It's a diverse cast and it should be," says Simm. "Things are changing for the better, slowly but surely." The first of two *Grace* films, *Dead Simple*, airs on ITV at 8pm on 14 March; the second, *Looking Good Dead*, later this year.

Like John Thaw, Simm is a bankable star, and there's plenty of source material. Peter James's 17th *Grace* novel is out in May and he's already "55 pages in" on number 18.

Does James see *Grace* becoming a TV institution? "I'd be devastated if it wasn't," he says, laughing. "Roy is desperately close to my heart... If we could have a series as long as *Morse*, I'd be over the moon."

"It's for the audience to say and not for us to make that call," adds Lewis. "You never take anything for granted. It's a two-hour slot, as was *Sharpe*, *Lewis*, *Morse* and *Kavanagh*, so it's going to invite comparisons with those kinds of shows. But, hopefully, it's very much its own thing. [*Grace*] is contemporary and the pace is completely different – it's a roller-coaster ride for the audience. We'd love to do more." ■

# How to cut TV's carbon footprint

**E**ach hour of television produced leaves a carbon footprint of 9.2 tonnes, which is the equivalent of two households' annual consumption. This startling figure is the average across all genres – quadruple it for drama.

That was the top line given by Roser Canela Mas of Albert, the pan-industry body set up to help make television production sustainable, at an RTS panel discussion, “Producing sustainable TV – myth or reality?”.

Laying out the problem, she emphasised that climate scientists have warned of irreversible consequences if the average temperature of the Earth's atmosphere rises by more than 1.5°C by 2050. “So far, temperatures have risen by 1°C, so we are 0.5°C away from where we shouldn't get,” said Canela Mas, industry sustainability manager at Bafta and Albert. “In terms of our industry, it means that, while reusable water bottles are a good start, we need to look at how we operate as a business in order to be more resilient in the future.”

One positive sign that she noted was that all UK broadcasters had signed up to request carbon footprint details as part of the production process. And the “net zero 2030” target adopted by many companies suggested that the industry was prioritising its environmental impact.

Phil Holdgate, head of production sustainability at ITV Studios, explained that the goal of becoming carbon

## An RTS panel examines how TV producers can play their part in combating global warming

neutral by 2030 relied on four pillars. The first was energy, he said: “Things such as powering our studios with renewable energy, and emissions that we can directly control, like diesel generators.

“The second is waste. How do we eliminate waste in the first place and, then, how do we manage it on an ongoing basis. That includes things like trying to eliminate single-use plastics, as well.

“Third is sourcing – 90% of emissions sit in our supply chain. It's out of our direct control but it is within our indirect control.

“There's a lot more industry collaboration on sourcing, because a lot of producers and broadcasters share the same supply chain.”

Holdgate noted that there was “a live conversation about sports broadcasting, because it's a niche field and there's a small group of suppliers for that particular genre. There are lots of conversations [taking place] between ITV Sports, Sky Sports and the BBC, where they are engaging with the suppliers.

“It's not all about beating people with a big stick. It's about figuring out

how you can all work together for that common purpose.”

Changing the culture was Holdgate's fourth pillar. “My stock phrase is: being sustainable isn't my job, it's everyone's job,” he said. “That includes things such as training – one-to-one sessions, even this session. It allows people to understand what their piece in the puzzle is.”

Canela Mas also stressed the importance of shared responsibility, explaining that this was why she avoided the idea of having designated environmental officers within a production.

Jane Atkinson, senior vice-president of global production at Fremantle, who is helping to expand Albert's remit internationally, gave an example of how sustainability could be baked into production decisions when it was part of the overall culture.

“Italy's *X Factor* traditionally shoots its audition shows in a huge circus tent. The producers noticed that there was a building company in Rome that had been requested by the government to reduce its emissions.

“As part of that, it put fabric on the exterior of [its construction sites] that absorbed pollution from cars. *X Factor Italia* approached the company and asked if it could make the tent out of that material. We would never even have thought about that.”

Indeed, new advances in technology are helping to make sustainability more achievable. “There's a lot of work being done around cloud-based technology, for example, so you don't have

to take all of the kit and caboodle with you wherever you go,” said Holdgate. “That has been accelerated by Covid, but it was something we were maybe working towards, potentially with a slightly longer roadmap.

“Likewise, what does 5G mean? Do we need great big satellite trucks? And if the kit is getting smaller, then, potentially, the vehicles can get smaller. And does electrification or hydrogen power come into that as well?”

Yet, sustainable production is only part of the puzzle in terms of television’s environmental impact. Richard Watsham, director of commissioning

to sustainability with the producer, said Watsham.

“There are clever ways, but you have to weave them in at the beginning,” he said, adding that it was especially important to start early with scripted comedy and drama.

UKTV has committed to a robust follow-up, too, by gathering “information, through post-production

society’s perception of the problem. “We’ve already reached the people who are more likely to be engaged first. It’s the people who least want to engage with it that we want to reach,” said Watsham.

“That’s why it isn’t just about shouting really loudly – if you shout really loudly in someone’s face, sometimes they don’t want to listen. We’ve got to be more imaginative in how we get our messaging across.”

One idea he wanted to see employed was a “DNA report” on a programme’s sustainability that could be shown to interested broadcasters.

While there was still much to do,



TV productions can involve huge energy expenditure on moving people and gear

at UKTV since 2014 and responsible for the likes of *Judge Romesh*, suggested that, “when you think about the TV industry relative to other industries, one of the biggest impacts we can have is influence. That’s going to have more significance [even] than important work within our own industry.”

To that end, there has been a push to shape how TV can change social attitudes towards sustainability. Albert collects data on how often climate change is mentioned in programmes. While the number of mentions increased between its annual reports, “it is still lower than words such as cats, cakes and weddings”, said Canela Mas.

At UKTV, “planet placement” (an Albert initiative to raise awareness of climate change) is part of the production process: before production starts, UKTV discusses opportunities relating

paperwork, on every single ‘planet placement’ within all of our programmes, whether they’re verbal or visual”.

“We’ve also committed to having a meeting at the end of every production to discuss with the producers how they got on, in order to hold all of our feet to the flames a little.”

The panellists were agreed that they wanted the climate change message to be delivered tactfully within programmes. “I’m a big TV consumer,” said Canela Mas. “If I put the TV on and I have a programme telling me I’m a terrible human being, I’m going to change the channel. I don’t want to know that after work.

“All I want to know is how I can make it better.”

They were also unanimous that promoting the term “climate emergency” was unhelpful at this stage of

Albert’s very existence showed that the industry was in a strong position to become sustainable.

“The TV industry in the UK is blessed because we have Albert. It is 10 years old this year, and it’s one of the greatest examples I’ve come across of pan-industry collaboration, probably anywhere in the world,” said Watsham. “We see normal competitors in the market laying down their tools, working together in a holistic way towards a shared purpose.”

These collective efforts suggest that, in the realm of television, sustainability is more solid than a myth. ■

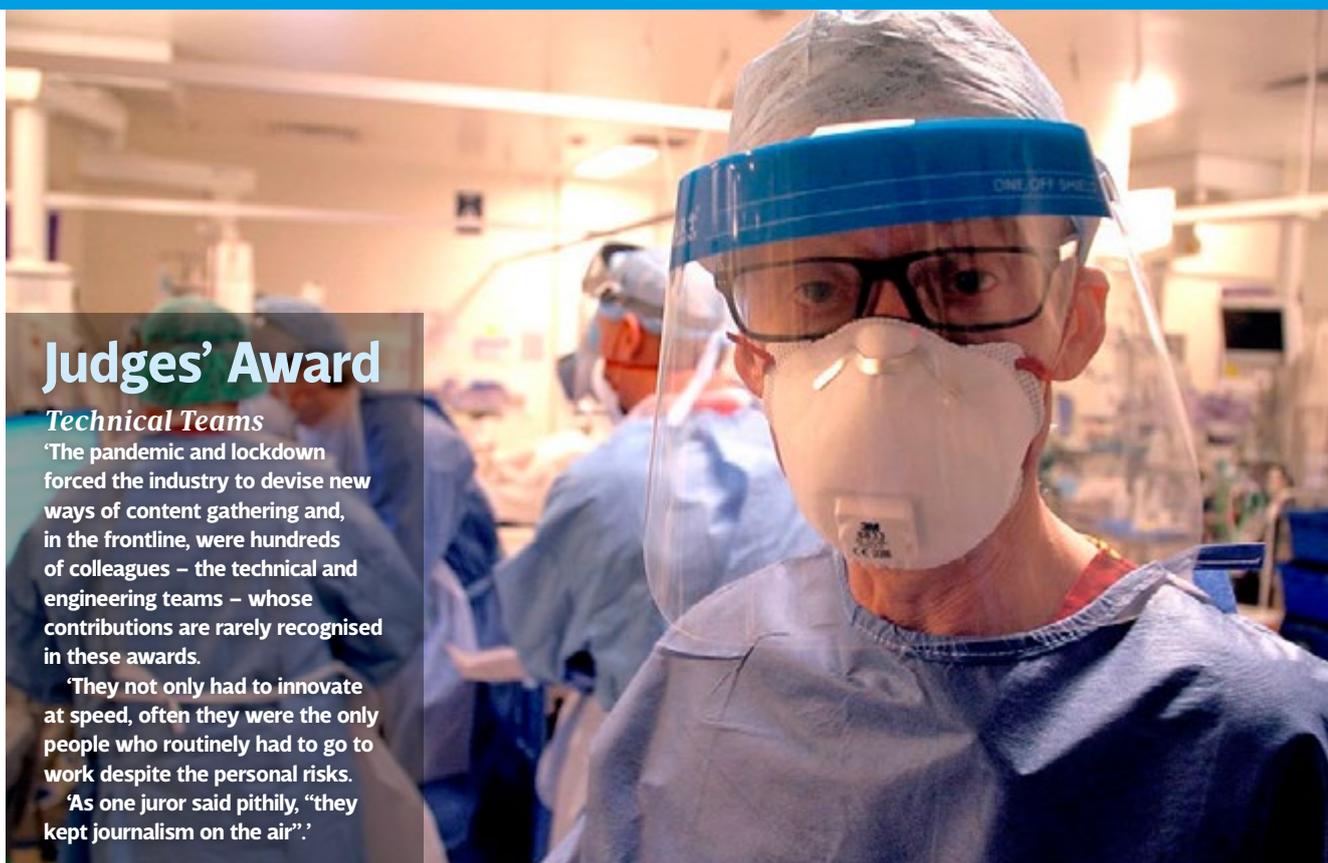
**Report by Shilpa Ganatra. ‘Producing sustainable TV – myth or reality?’ was an RTS event held on 2 March. It was chaired by journalist Lucy Siegle. The producers were Victoria Fairclough and Emily Wilson.**



**Mishal Husain** and  
**Simon Bucks** presented  
the ceremony streamed  
on 24 February

# RTS Television Journalism Awards 2021

*Clive Myrie, BBC; Network  
Presenter of the Year and  
Television Journalist of the Year*



BBC

## Judges' Award

### Technical Teams

'The pandemic and lockdown forced the industry to devise new ways of content gathering and, in the frontline, were hundreds of colleagues – the technical and engineering teams – whose contributions are rarely recognised in these awards.

'They not only had to innovate at speed, often they were the only people who routinely had to go to work despite the personal risks.

'As one juror said pithily, "they kept journalism on the air".'

## Breaking News

### Beirut Blast

Al Jazeera English

'All three shortlisted entries brilliantly reported three very different breaking stories – all as shocking as they were dramatic. The winner was largely the work of a single resident correspondent, Zeina Khodr, working tirelessly for hours at a stretch. She not only captured the essential details of what had happened, and its impact, but underpinned the narrative with key background information, local knowledge and political context.'

#### Nominees:

- ▶ **Coronavirus – Boris Johnson Rushed to Hospital**, BBC News for BBC News Channel
- ▶ **London Bridge Attack**, Sky News

## Camera Operator of the Year

### David McIlveen – BBC News at Ten

BBC News for BBC One

'David's work demonstrated a mastery of composition and lighting. A cameraman with all the technical skills and a sympathetic eye on the story narrative, he managed to create new ways of filming sequences that [even] experts wondered how he achieved his results.'

#### Nominees:

- ▶ **Dan Morgan**, Sky News
- ▶ **Natalie Thomas**, Reuters Video News for Thomson Reuters News

## Current Affairs – Home

### Panorama – The Forgotten Frontline

BBC Panorama for BBC One

'This excellent film combined both heart and policy as it followed the unfolding tragedy in care homes as they struggled to protect residents against coronavirus over several months. It demonstrated great storytelling and analysis, with extraordinary interviews. It was a searing, emotional film, very powerful and gave a devastating account.'

#### Nominees:

- ▶ **Hunting the People Smugglers (Exposure)**, David Modell Productions for ITV
- ▶ **In Cold Blood (Exposure)**, Darlow Smithson Productions for ITV

## Current Affairs – International

### BBC News Arabic – The Schools that Chain Boys

BBC News Arabic for BBC iPlayer

'A detailed and forensic exposé of the shocking abuse of young boys in Islamic schools in Sudan, featuring the eyewitness accounts of two of the boys.'

#### Nominees:

- ▶ **Into the Red Zone**, Sky News
- ▶ **This World – Italy's Frontline: A Doctor's Diary**, BBC TV Current Affairs London, Mongoose Pictures and PBS Frontline for BBC Two

## Daily News Programme of the Year

### ITV News at Ten

ITN/ITV News for ITV

'This was a very closely fought contest, with breakfast programmes, daily news shows and main bulletins all delivering outstanding entries. The winner combined compelling storytelling on a wide range of subject matters, with great reportage, writing and presenting.'

#### Nominees:

- ▶ **BBC Breakfast**, BBC News for BBC One
- ▶ **BBC News at Ten**, BBC News for BBC One

## Digital Award

### Need To Know – 2019 UK General Election Series

Seth Goolnik and Warren Nettleford, ntk.network

'Designed to make political journalism engaging for young people, the service was initially broadcast on the Snapchat platform covering the final weeks of the 2019 general election campaign. Its storytelling techniques combined a lightness of touch and humour to tell important political stories.'

#### Nominees:

- ▶ **Being Black at Cambridge**, BBC News for BBC News Online/BBC iPlayer
- ▶ **Go There – Fear and Anxiety in the Epicenter of the Wuhan Coronavirus Outbreak**, CNN

## Interview of the Year

**Andrew Marr and the Chinese Ambassador – The Andrew Marr Show**  
BBC News for BBC One

'A fantastic example of TV interviewing art at its best. It was a masterclass in technique, gutsy and went for the jugular, showing a brilliant use of silence. Made me proud to be a British journalist, Andrew was respectful, rude and across his brief... it was a real coup.'

### Nominees:

- ▶ **Channel 4 News – Ciaran Jenkins/ Michael Gove**, ITN for Channel 4
- ▶ **CNN Tonight – Sara Sidner Interviews Minneapolis Police Chief with Floyd Family Live**, CNN

## Nations and Regions Current Affairs

**Unequal Force? A BBC London Special**  
BBC London for BBC One

'An outstanding piece of journalism. It was a brave, moving and shocking programme, investigating the relationship between black people and the police in the capital over the past 50 years. The effort put into getting the community to trust the programme-makers paid off in the quality of the interviews. A timely and compelling watch that was informative, balanced and unsettling.'

### Nominees:

- ▶ **Disclosure: Scotland's Lockdown**, BBC Scotland for BBC One Scotland
- ▶ **Spotlight – The Killings of the Three Scottish Soldiers**, BBC Northern Ireland

## Nations and Regions News

**Coronavirus in London: Who's Hit the Hardest?**  
BBC London for BBC One

'An astonishing and prescient journalistic endeavour. There have been many programmes about coronavirus but this was agenda-setting journalism based on meticulous research and a deep understanding of the region. Using a series of well-crafted films and an excellent reporting team, the programme established, well before others, how ethnic groups have been disproportionately impacted by Covid-19.'

### Nominees:

- ▶ **ITV News Calendar – Jack Charlton Tribute**, ITV Yorkshire for ITV
- ▶ **ITV News West Country – The Toppling of Colston**, ITV West Country for ITV



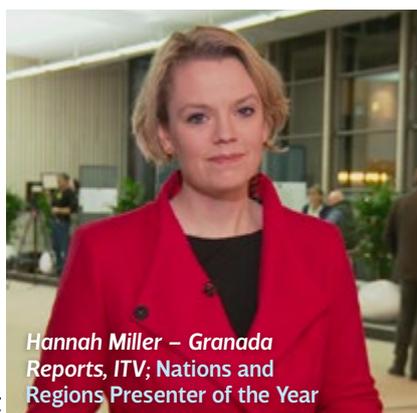
ITV



Al Jazeera



Sky



ITV



ntk.network



Andrew Marr and the Chinese Ambassador – The Andrew Marr Show; Interview of the Year

BBC



Unequal Force? A BBC London Special, BBC London; Nations and Regions Current Affairs

BBC



David McIlveen – BBC News at Ten; Camera Operator of the Year

BBC

## Nations and Regions Presenter of the Year

**Hannah Miller – Granada Reports**

ITV News Granada for ITV

‘Hannah represented her audience in everything she tackled. Her ability to get to the heart of each story with her probing style and authority [went with] a warm personality and courtesy. Her tightly written scripts always complemented the pictures. She truly symbolised her region.’

### Nominees:

► **Riz Lateef**, BBC London for BBC One

► **Charlene White – ITV News London**, ITN/ITV News for ITV

## Network Presenter of the Year

**Clive Myrie – BBC News at Ten; BBC News at One; BBC News Channel**

BBC News for BBC One and BBC News Channel

‘Brilliant, versatile, measured, compelling, relaxed but reassuring and empathetic were just some of the adjectives used by jurors. The winner had had an astonishing year – as excellent as a package-maker and interviewer as a studio and location presenter.’

### Nominees:

**John King**, CNN

**Victoria Derbyshire – BBC News for BBC News Channel**, BBC Two and BBC One

## News Coverage – Home

### Covid UK

Sky News

‘All entries covering the Covid crises were of an exceptionally high standard, but Sky’s coverage stood out because of its variety of angles and insight into the lives of ordinary people. From the packed hospital wards to the A-level students, from the government dithering to the data, and from those in high-rise blocks in the shadow of Grenfell, to the joyous “and finally” tale of the Manchester DJ trying to lift spirits in a rooftop rave, Sky’s output was a must-watch during these difficult times.’

### Nominees:

► **Covid and the Care Home Crisis**, BBC News for BBC One

► **The Tavistock’s Gender Identity Development Service – Newsnight**, BBC Two

BBC



BBC News Arabic – The Schools that Chain Boys, BBC; Current Affairs – International

BBC



Coronavirus in London: Who’s Hit the Hardest?, BBC London; Nations and Regions News

BBC

## News Coverage – International

### A Warning from Italy

Sky News

‘These reports were a wake-up call for the UK. Stuart Ramsay’s scripts were prophetic of the disasters that were yet to come and contained warnings that went unheeded. Powerful and brave journalism.’

#### Nominees:

- ▶ **The Death of George Floyd**, CNN
- ▶ **Beirut Explosion – ITV News**, ITN/ITV News for ITV

## News Technology

### The Trump Data Leak – Channel 4 News

ITN for Channel 4

‘Channel 4 News made headlines around the world with its investigation into the Trump administration’s manipulation of data. A small team of journalists came up with a range of technological solutions to painstakingly access and interpret vast amounts of data. They revealed, among other things, the Republican strategy for preventing voting in black communities.’

#### Nominees:

- ▶ **BBC News Online: What Covid-19 Means for You**, BBC News for BBC News Online
- ▶ **Sky News Remote: Life After Lockdown**, Sky News

## Scoop of the Year

### Free School Meals

BBC Breakfast for BBC One

‘The product of great contact building, perseverance, diplomacy and a clear eye for a story. Everyone wanted this exclusive but only one team got it and it made headlines everywhere for days.’

#### Nominees:

- ▶ **Abuse in British Gymnastics – ITV News**, ITN/ITV News for ITV
- ▶ **Inside Italy’s Red Zone**, Sky News

## Specialist Journalist of the Year

### Nick Martin – Sky News

Sky News

‘He was one of the first to raise the alarm about residents being discharged from hospital back to care homes without a negative Covid test. He brought to life the human dramas of care-home residents and their relatives while holding politicians to account. A damn good journalist, with great attention to detail.’

#### Nominees:

- ▶ **Gary Gibbon – Channel 4 News**, ITN for Channel 4
- ▶ **Victoria Macdonald – Channel 4 News**, ITN for Channel 4



Sky

## News Channel of the Year

Sky News

‘As the Covid pandemic unfolded, news channels provided crucial information, as it emerged, that affected us all. All three nominated channels did a first-class job reporting the virus and explaining the medical science and data with which we are now, sadly, all too familiar.’

‘There were other huge stories, too – notably the death of George Floyd and

the Black Lives Matter movement, climate change and the final, chaotic days of the Trump presidency. The winning channel was distinguished by its high-quality, global coverage but, in particular, by its revelations on the Covid crisis in Britain’s care homes – a real national scandal.’

#### Nominees:

- ▶ **BBC News Channel**
- ▶ **CNN International**



Sky

Nick Martin, Sky News;  
Specialist Journalist of the Year



John Ryley,  
Sky News;  
Outstanding  
Contribution



BBC

Free School Meals, BBC One;  
Scoop of the Year



Renata Brito, Associated Press;  
Young Talent of the Year

## Television Journalist of the Year

**Clive Myrie – BBC**

BBC News for BBC News Channel

‘The pandemic has produced some remarkable reporting on all channels. The three nominees all demonstrated great journalistic strength, powerful writing and real humanity in their work, but one stood out for the judges for the all-round quality of their reporting.’

### Nominees:

▶ **Alex Crawford – Sky News**

▶ **Robert Moore – ITV News, ITN/ITV News for ITV**

## Young Talent of the Year

**Renata Brito – Video Journalist**

The Associated Press

‘In the 25th anniversary of the Young Talent of the Year award – launched in memory of John Schofield, the BBC and ITN reporter shot and killed in Croatia – the judges were delighted at the strength and range of talent nominated.’

‘Agency journalists have been the unsung heroes of the last year, when many newsrooms could not deploy as they would have wished.’

‘Renata’s portfolio showed an extraordinary range, tracking the impact of the pandemic from Europe to Brazil, and migration across the Mediterranean. With great commitment, she got inside stories when others couldn’t and showed great initiative and compassion.’

### Nominees:

▶ **Rianna Croxford**, BBC News for BBC One and BBC News Channel

▶ **Fadi Al Halabi – Channel 4 News**, ITN for Channel 4

## Outstanding Contribution

**John Ryley**

Sky News

‘The Outstanding Contribution award goes to a journalist who really has done what it says on the tin – effected genuine change in our business. He has worked for all three of the major UK broadcasters. His style is innovative, idiosyncratic. His integrity, influence and authority, colossal.’ ■



The Trump Data Leak,  
Channel 4 News;  
News Technology



A Warning from Italy, Sky News;  
News Coverage – International



Watch the full video of the RTS  
Television Journalism Awards 2021  
at: [bit.ly/RTS-tvj](https://bit.ly/RTS-tvj)



The Undoing: star casting

Sky

## Is there too much telly?

**RTS London** Steve Clarke hears there are plenty of great shows to discover, but they are not as easy to find as they could be

**W**e live during the golden age of TV. But is there too much eye-candy and is lockdown encouraging us to become addicted to series that, during ordinary times, would seem, well, mediocre?

That was the core of an RTS London discussion, “Too much TV!”, which examined how the pandemic is affecting our viewing tastes and why, despite significant progress, platforms need better curation to guide audiences through the labyrinth of peak TV.

As the panellists agreed, you can’t have too much great TV. Whether there is enough of it is a moot point. And, perhaps, ultimately, the definition of what constitutes outstanding TV is subjective.

Manori Ravindran, *Variety’s*

international editor, reminded the RTS that nominations for the Golden Globes had bizarrely omitted *I May Destroy You*, widely regarded as one of the best TV shows of 2020.

She recounted how, despite herself, she’d invested a lot of time and emotion in Sky Atlantic’s much-marketed thriller *The Undoing*. In retrospect, she regarded the show she was addicted to as a routine crime series, regardless of the star casting of Nicole Kidman and Hugh Grant.

Spending 20 minutes scrolling through Netflix trying to find a show to watch and then giving up, a victim of what panellist Nigel Walley, MD of consultancy Decipher, described as “the tyranny of choice”, was not an uncommon experience, according to Frances Taylor, streaming

editor at the *Radio Times*.

As with modern pop on services such as Spotify, decisions about what to watch on Netflix are often made by briefly sampling a particular show, perhaps with 10 minutes of viewing.

Would better curation help navigate the ocean of TV? The standout shows are there, even if they are not always easy to find.

Arguably, thought the panellists, word-of-mouth recommendations communicated via social media were a more effective way for certain audiences to discover something rewarding, than relying on the streamers’ own recommendations.

“The success of shows such as *Bridgerton* and *Normal People* owed a lot to clips being shown on social media,” said

Taylor. “If your friends are really into something and they tell you about it, you’re more likely to give it a go because you trust their opinions.”

Listening to this debate, there appeared to be two distinct kinds of viewers – younger audiences fond of box-set bingeing on streaming services and older audiences, who tended to default to traditional broadcasters.

“I’m watching live Six Nations rugby at the moment,” said Walley, acknowledging that he was twice the age of the other two panellists and session chair Abby Robinson. “We can’t forget the fact that people are still consuming soaps every day. I’d like to fly the flag for live, scheduled linear broadcast TV, and not just focus on on-demand.”

He said more technological innovation was in the pipeline to aid viewers faced by too much choice: “Sky Q, Netflix and Amazon have driven innovation in presentation and search. There’s still lots to do... Better quality search and recommendation will probably be the next wave of tech innovation.”

What, then, constituted a hit in this era of peak TV? It didn’t always correlate to the size of a show’s budget, argued Walley. Sometimes social relevance was key, he added, highlighting the breakout success of Channel 4’s *It’s a Sin*, set during the Aids epidemic of the 1980s.

“Social-issue drama, and I’m including *I May Destroy You*, that is topical encourages word-of-mouth recommendations,” added Ravindran. ■

*‘Too much TV! Navigating the new golden age’ was held on 10 February, chaired by Digital Spy TV writer Abby Robinson, and produced by Philip Barnes and Damien Ashton-Wellman.*

A restored version of 1968 comedy classic *Carry On Up the Khyber* for the BritBox streaming service was the surprise winner of a prize for post-production excellence at last year's RTS Yorkshire Awards.

"In conversation" with RTS Yorkshire Chair Fiona Thompson in February, ITV Content Delivery's James Macmillan recalled: "We were totally blown away.... It's been a very tough year for everyone, but I can't think of a better way of ending 2020 than by winning the award."

The Leeds-based business development manager explained how the *Carry On* movie was restored to its original condition.

To show the BritBox editorial team what was possible, he said, "We took a [35mm] reel of a *Carry On* film out of the archive and transferred it. We picked a couple of scenes to restore.... There was a real night and day difference between before and after."

Discussing the thinking



*Carry On Up the Khyber*

ITV

## Carry on restoring

behind restoring classic movies, Macmillan said: "We don't want a *Carry On* film to look like it was made in the 21st century.... We want it to look as good as it possibly could have looked the very first time it was presented.

"The *Carry Ons* have never

been seen in high-definition before.... There's definitely an appetite for more films to be restored."

ITV Content Delivery restores and digitises the broadcaster's huge archive of film and tape. "We're the custodians of ITV's archive

and we've got film dating back to the 1920s in the vaults in Leeds. We've got a duty of care for that content to make sure it is preserved and available for future generations to watch and enjoy," said Macmillan.

**Matthew Bell**

## Raiders of the lost archive

Footage from a 1989 episode of *Bullseye* – sourced from the ITV Archive in Leeds – was used for a key sequence in *The Pembrokeshire Murders*. The suspect in the ITV true-crime drama, John Cooper, had appeared in the game show, which gave the police the evidence to convict him.

"Being able to access that kind of thing is absolutely amazing," said Mark Witty, a producer at ITV regional news show *Calendar*, who was talking at an RTS event on TV archives last month. "For me and all my fellow producers in news, [archives are] an invaluable source.

"I did a piece a while ago from some archive filmed in 1968 in a slum street in Leeds [featuring] some urchin kids playing. We put it out, asking, 'Is this you?' Three of them got back to us... and we put them in an edit suite and filmed them looking back at themselves 50 years ago."

Sue Howard, director of the Yorkshire Film Archive, said archive content had a variety of values: it was a "key cultural asset"; of commercial value to rights holders; and, for regional collections, it was important for their communities who "identify with it". She added: "If we don't continue to keep it

visible, that value will diminish."

Sue Todd, partnership manager at the British Film Institute, said her organisation's focus was on the 'mass digitisation of videotape'. She summed up the BFI's overall strategy as 'collecting, preserving and making that material accessible'.

Screen Yorkshire chief Sally Joynson identified the biggest challenges facing archives: "We have an explosion of content-makers, platforms and producers – how on earth do you chart a course through that new landscape? What do you preserve? Who do you negotiate with? Who is your audience?"

"Content made in Yorkshire is produced for audiences across the globe, so the whole basis on which we determine what to collect and preserve has changed enormously."

Looking to the future, BBC News archive manager David Wormstone outlined his hopes for TV archives: "Make it all digital and make it accessible."

Howard added: "Regional collections... capture the character of a region. The material that is held in those collections is vital to the cultural and historical record of our country. But that material is only of value if it is used and seen by people."

"Protecting Yorkshire's TV's heritage" was a joint RTS Yorkshire/RTS Archives Group event.

**Matthew Bell**

Journalism awards

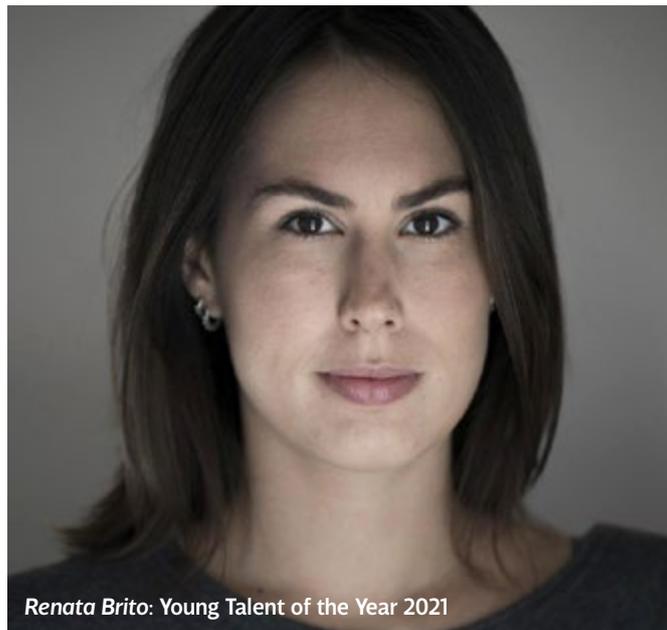
Since Susie Schofield helped set up an RTS Television Journalism Award in honour of her late husband 25 years ago, one thing has remained constant: the sheer quality of young talent vying for the prize.

“It’s so important to cherish and recognise the young talent you have working for you,” said Schofield. “For the past three years, I’ve been on the jury for the award and it’s always so difficult to whittle it down to the final three. There is so much talent out there.”

John Schofield was shot in 1995 while covering the war in Croatia for the BBC, aged 29. His widow was taken aback by the huge number of letters she received following his death. They all said John had been certain to become the leading journalist of his generation.

John was totally unaware of the high esteem his peers held him in. His wife was determined that no other young journalists should be put in that position – “to die and not know their worth” – so she set up the John Schofield Trust.

The trust pairs rookie journalists with mentors, drawn from the UK’s main TV news



Renata Brito: Young Talent of the Year 2021

AP

## Schofield prize marks 25 years

providers, BBC News, ITN and Sky News. It launched the RTS Young Journalist of the Year Award in 1996 in memory of John. All winners are given mentors.

The award was renamed the Young Talent of the Year Award in 2014 and recognises outstanding work on- or off-screen by a journalist under the age of 30.

Past winners have included the Irish investigative reporter Donal MacIntyre, BBC economics editor Faisal Islam and Waad al-Kateab, the Syrian Oscar-nominated film-maker

Recently, more winners have come from diverse and overseas backgrounds. The 2019 winner was Anja Popp, who went on to be mentored by Kamal Ahmed, until recently the editorial director of BBC News. This year’s winner was Brazilian-born Renata Brito, who now works for Associated Press in Barcelona.

While the award is in rude health, one thing that dismays Schofield is that so many of today’s young journalists work on short-term contracts.

“There are fewer staff jobs today, so there’s less job security than there used to be,” she says. “This pains me. How can you plan your life with a series of short-term contracts?”

“That puts off a lot of talented people from becoming journalists. Another problem is retaining people, especially those from BAME backgrounds, who often find they are the only non-white voice in the room.”

**Steve Clarke**

## Covid has led to news innovation

Thames Valley

The Covid-19 pandemic has driven technological innovation in TV newsrooms, with many doing tasks at home that were once believed to require broadcast studios. It has also caused news audiences to surge as people have sought out trusted information.

Simon Morice, who chaired the RTS Thames Valley session “Will news ever be the same again?” last month, highlighted how innovative services on YouTube, such as the US podcast *Too Long; Didn’t Read*, were offering “authentic

voices” to young people, who tended to shun mainstream TV news bulletins.

The service is funded by a mix of advertising revenue and crowdfunding. “There does seem to be a substantial wave of these sites,” he said.

However, Glen Mulcahy, a former head of innovation at RTÉ, questioned whether these initiatives provided the kind of trusted, regulated news that public service broadcasters have been praised for during the pandemic. He said: “I’ve looked at the service, and the quality

of the production is exceptionally good – extremely well considered, editorially, and balanced.

“The problem is that there is no editorial oversight – so if, tomorrow, the producer gets a sponsorship deal that he doesn’t declare, his editorial line could go way left of centre, say, and no one is going to call him out.” During the Trump era, unregulated news services that lack impartiality rules have, argue some commentators, widened divisions in US society.

On technological

innovation, Mulcahy and fellow panellist Guy Pelham, an ex-senior editor at BBC News, were more upbeat.

“The pressure of the pandemic has forced innovation,” said Pelham. He cited a recent example of a reporter, camera operator and producer based, respectively, in Europe, Asia and Africa, who went to film a story in Africa. On their return to their homes, they were able to collaborate and assemble several pieces for TV.

“That sort of thing won’t go away,” said Pelham, who predicted that the spike in viewing for traditional TV news services would end once the health crisis was over.

**Steve Clarke**

# TikTok targets older viewers

**RTS London** The hugely popular short-form video platform is looking beyond its youthful audience, hears Tara Conlan

It was 2020's most downloaded app and is hugely popular with young audiences. No wonder broadcasters want to know how they can use TikTok to their best advantage.

According to TikTok's European strategy manager, Edward Lindeman, the short-form video platform, which started off as lip-synching app *Musical.ly*, now has 100 million monthly active users in Europe.

But to grow further, it is targeting older audiences with traditional TV talent using the app, such as Gordon Ramsay and Dan Walker.

In an informative RTS London session in late February, Lindeman said: "What we're working on as a business is delivering a content ecosystem – loads of great TikTok videos that will be interesting and relevant to users who are older.

"That's a major business driver for us. What's been really pleasing for us over the past year [is seeing] the number of users over 18 expand dramatically," he said.

Lindeman noted: "We have live functionality on TikTok, and we're actively looking for media partners to use it to deliver great content experiences." The platform has partnered with Sky News

to do a 24-hour live stream "to keep our users informed".

TikTok recently aired a live, long-form show about love, fronted by *Loose Women's* Judi Love, and a series of live events with prominent people, including Olly Alexander and Ian McKellen, to celebrate LGBT+ History Month.

Lindeman explained that, as the app learnt what users liked, producers should spend time practising on it. "There isn't a trick for engineering [a TikTok video to go viral but], when users are watching videos to the end or engaging with comments or sharing that content, these are really strong performance indicators that tell us this content is popular.

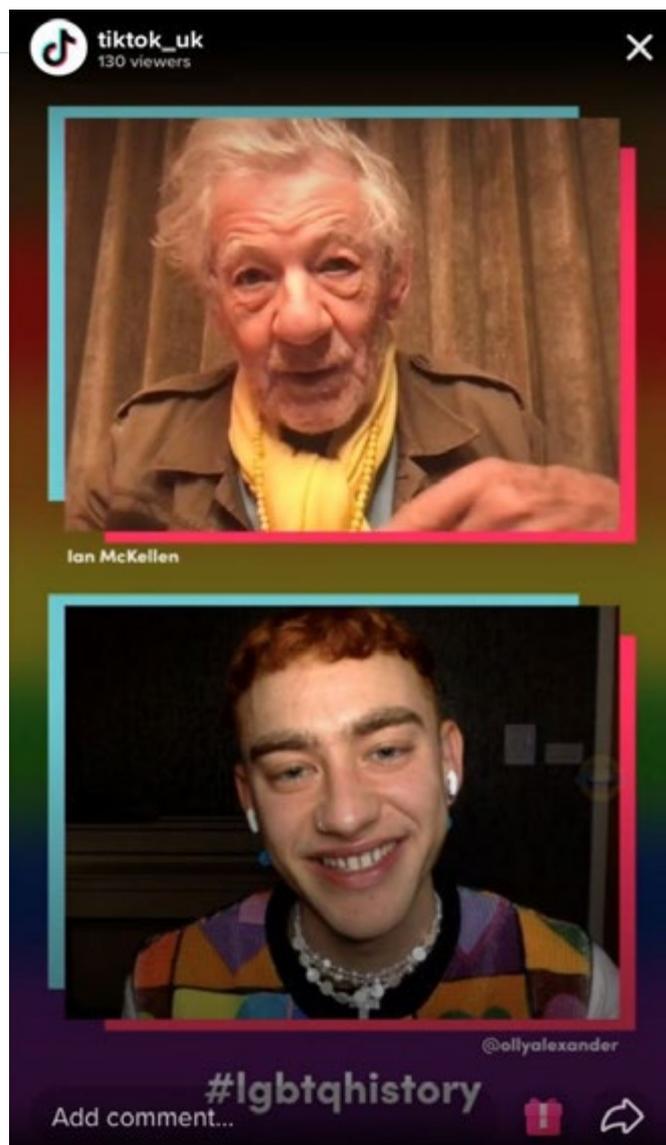
"Think about your content: are people likely to watch it to the end; will they find it original; and is it really engaging?"

**'WE'RE ACTIVELY LOOKING FOR MEDIA PARTNERS'**

TikTok public figure partnerships manager Michael Djan added that, by jumping on trends, being authentic and inspiring joy and creativity, public figures could increase their followings, "and that can be

really important, particularly for TV shows or those who want to leverage that".

Djan described TikTok as a space "where you can be yourself... taking the content out of a polished world



and into a creative world".

ITV senior digital entertainment producer Jen Leeming praised TikTok's "seemingly endless creative ways to make videos". She said *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!* had used TikTok to help connect with young viewers: "We wanted to think TikTok first, and that meant going into any shoot, and spending time with talent, thinking about the platform specifically, rather than re-versioning content from other platforms."

Leeming ensured a dedicated digital TikTok producer was hired for the show, and changed the account's posting schedule from night to morning, as many of the show's young fans had gone to bed. By the end of the series, *I'm a Celebrity's* TikTok

account had over 23 million views and had given ITV insight into which contestants resonated with the audience.

Lindeman encouraged producers to contact him on LinkedIn for help and argued that, although the platform runs ads, TikTok is "still working out" its monetisation.

He was tight-lipped about rumours that TikTok might launch longer, three-minute videos but, "for sure we're looking at different tools within the app that will make the platform as effective for content creators, both private individuals and publishers, as possible". ■

**'TikTok famous: How TV can leverage TikTok' was held on 24 February and produced by Damien Ashton-Wellman.**

# Books need ‘big hooks’ for TV

Women in Film & TV

From Austen to Atwood, hit dramas based on books are part of TV’s DNA. Be it *Pride and Prejudice* or *The Handmaid’s Tale*, what are the ingredients for a successful series adapted from a novel?

“As a producer, not every book does adapt, but what I need for an adaptation is something that has got a clear hook and an emotional pull,” explained Belinda Campbell, joint MD of Red Planet

Pictures. She was talking at a Women in Film and Television UK event last month.

Originality and the ability to stand out from the crowd are essential. “I have to think, ‘Can I see this on TV? And, commercially, can I sell it?’” she added.

Another must-have is the ability to sustain a whole series, not merely a compelling first episode. Campbell said: “You can have a brilliant idea, a brilliant first act and

then it doesn’t deliver on the rest of it. Sometimes you can fix that, but sometimes you can’t, because you’d be mucking up the DNA of this brilliant book.”

Screenwriter Kate Brooke, whose credits include *Mr Selfridge*, *A Discovery of Witches* and *Bancroft*, highlighted “big books with big worlds to grapple with” as vital elements for a successful small-screen adaptation.

“TV has changed so much

in the past 15 years that we’re now in a position to do those things. We’ve got CGI and the budgets,” she said.

Her most recent adaptation was series 1 of Sky’s historical fantasy *A Discovery of Witches* (Deborah Harkness wrote the books), regarded by some as one of the most successful TV adaptations of a sequence of novels. “It was definitely a challenge,” said Brooke. “I had to wrestle with it. It felt very ambitious, with lots of different worlds to deal with – vampires, demons and witches.”

**Steve Clarke**

Northern Ireland

BBC Scotland’s new boss, Steve Carson – a former Chair of the Society’s Northern Ireland Centre – looked back over his TV career last month in the company of Scott Duffield, Chair of RTS Futures Northern Ireland.

“I always wanted to work in broadcasting,” he recalled. “Probably, like a lot of people [growing up] in Northern Ireland at that time, and probably still today, I didn’t see anyone who sounded like me or who lived where I did on the television – outside of the news, unfortunately, talking about absolutely horrendous things.”

After graduating from Manchester University, Carson landed a job as a runner, having been rejected by BBC training schemes. He then moved, via youth and entertainment, to BBC current affairs as a producer/director on programmes that included *Newsnight* and *Panorama*.

“For my generation, growing up during the Troubles, current affairs was pretty much around you,” said Carson. “My father was a print journalist, and a good one, on the *Belfast Telegraph*. I grew up in a house in which the news was on and I was encouraged to read the *Telegraph* from



Steve Carson

BBC

## The BBC’s new man in Glasgow

cover to cover.” He returned to Ireland and went on to found an indie, Mint Productions, before becoming director of programmes at RTÉ in 2009.

Carson rejoined the corporation as head of BBC Northern Ireland Productions in

2013, before moving to head of multiplatform commissioning at BBC Scotland.

The latter give Carson the “opportunity to launch a channel”, but it also allowed him to work across TV, radio, online and social media platforms: “They’re not

different industries – they’re different services within the industry of broadcasting.”

He was promoted to head of BBC Scotland last year.

Offering advice to youngsters looking for a break in TV, Carson said: “Don’t think that other people necessarily know more or better than you. If you’ve got the creative spark and you’re interested [in TV] that’s half the battle... Just get out and do something and, if it doesn’t work out, start again.”

The RTS session with Carson was part of the Digital Cities Virtual event run by the BBC Academy last month.

■ Controller of BBC Three Fiona Campbell has succeeded Vikkie Taggart as Chair of RTS Northern Ireland Centre. “Northern Ireland is an incredibly vibrant part of the television ecology, with so much talent and potential, and I’m incredibly proud to be named as Chair,” said Campbell.

“As one of the most significant commissioners of content based outside London and with her home base in Belfast, Fiona is exceptionally well placed to continue to support the remarkable talent in the nation,” said Society CEO Theresa Wise.

**Matthew Bell**

The main prizes at the RTS West of England Student Television

Awards in late February were shared around the region's educational establishments. A team of students from the University of Gloucestershire scooped the Scripted award with *Paper Round Boy*. The judges described their "funny and charming take on the super hero genre" as a "brilliant, artistic little film".

The Non-scripted award went to *I Can't Breathe* by students from the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. This response to the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement was an "incredibly moving and powerful film", which one judge said was "one of the best student films I've ever seen".

Chris Childs from the University of the West of England took the Animation award for *My Favourite Hill*, which the judges described as "delightfully unhinged", with "some lovely moments".

Students from the University of Gloucestershire



UWE

## Lockdown students excel

dominated the Craft awards. Owen Jenkins won the Editing – Scripted prize for *There Was a Green Light*, while Alex Camper's *A Beautiful Beach Hut* and Samuel Oxtan's *The Last*

*Bank Robbery of Clive and Maude* both won Camera-work – Scripted awards.

Curtis Pyke from the University of the West of England was awarded the

Camerawork – Non-Scripted prize for *Strongman*.

"Another outstanding year for creative talent in the West of England and all the more impressive as many entries were completed in lockdown," said RTS West of England Chair Lynn Barlow.

Bristol City Council's senior film manager, Laura Aviles, spoke at the online ceremony, outlining a major expansion of the city's Bottle Yard Studios.

**Matthew Bell**

### RTS West of England Student Television Awards winners

**Animation** - *My Favourite Hill* - Chris Childs, University of the West of England

**Non-scripted** - *I Can't Breathe* - Lionelle Nsarhaza, Nelson Nsarhaza, Gemma Warren and Ben Prusiner,

Bristol Old Vic Theatre School

**Scripted** - *Paper Round Boy* - George Stickley, Anastasija Pcelinceva, Ted Box, Millie Bennett and Brandon Thompson, University of Gloucestershire

**Craft Skills: Camerawork – Non-scripted** - *Strong Man* - Curtis Pyke, University of the West of England

**Craft Skills: Editing – Scripted**

**There Was a Green Light** - Owen Jenkins, University of Gloucestershire

**Craft Skills: Camerawork – Scripted** - *A Beautiful Beach Hut* - Alex Camper, University of Gloucestershire

**Craft Skills: Camerawork – Scripted** - *The Last Bank Robbery of Clive and Maude* - Samuel Oxtan, University of Gloucestershire

## How to 'smash' an interview...

Chewing gum or answering your phone were just two of many ways applicants could sabotage their chances during an interview, heard the attendees at an RTS Futures workshop earlier this month.

The session was run by Creative Train founder Jade Gordon, who went on to offer advice on how to "smash" an

interview for an entry-level job in television.

Before an interview, she advised: "Do your research – learn about the company, watch the shows.

"Think about the skills or experience you have to offer a show. Remember, when it gets to the interview, you're going to have to sell yourself."

Wider knowledge of the TV

industry was important, as was a passion for telly. "Watch TV and be ready to discuss your favourite programmes in an interview," said Gordon. But, she added, "try to have some other types of programmes to discuss" as well as a binge-worthy Netflix drama.

During the coronavirus epidemic, job interviews have tended to be online, she said.

"If you're on screen, rather than in person, you're still more than able to let your personality shine through.

"Use your comfort zone to your advantage – you're in your home. You shouldn't be half as nervous as if you're meeting someone in person."

Before setting up Creative Train, which offers advice and services to people wanting to work in television and to TV employers, Gordon recruited for Viacom and ITV.

**Matthew Bell**

**RTS Futures** The team behind ITV2 hit *Love Island* discussed their work as reality-show casting professionals at an RTS Futures session last month.

“You’re only as good as your last cast’ – that’s the mantra we use every year on *Love Island*,” said Lewis Evans, one of the series producers on the show, which is currently casting for its next run in the summer. He has been part of the *Love Island* casting team since the first series.

Evans continued: “The key to working in casting is that you’ve got to like people... I love chatting and I am incredibly nosey – casting gives you the opportunity to go and talk to anyone.”

“You need to have an ear and an eye out for [potential] contributors,” said casting producer Henry Byrne. “They might not be right for what you’re working on at the moment, but it’s worth storing them up for when you’re working on another show.”

Fellow casting producer Mo Mohsin said: “Generally, you know when someone walks in, by the way they carry themselves and their personality”, whether he or she



## Casting for reality TV

is right for a show. Evans, however, noted that some people are “slow burners”, who develop during a show – “a grower, not a shower”.

Casting assistant producer Bianca Clayton explained that “diversity is always important – you need a mix of people that represent the UK”. She added that “casting is a

numbers game”, which means that she has to cast her net wide. “You need to think of creative ways of reaching people.”

Since the coronavirus pandemic, casting has become less London-centric. “We all work from home now and I would love nothing better than to have someone on

the team who lives in [say] South Wales or Scotland... We can cast from anywhere,” said Evans.

The RTS Futures event “All about TV casting” was held on 22 February, and was chaired and produced by ITV entertainment talent manager Lauren Evans.

**Matthew Bell**

## The UPSIDE

### Everything I long to do, it’s a sin

Congratulations to Channel 4 for proving, with *It’s a Sin*, that truly great TV drama doesn’t need to cost a fortune. Russell T Davies’s writing keeps on getting better – and more popular. *It’s a Sin* has generated 18.9 million views on All 4, and is one of the service’s most successful box sets ever.

But the *It’s a Sin* effect doesn’t stop there. The series

is credited with driving a surge in people ordering an HIV test. What better demonstration of public service broadcasting?

### Line up, line up, we better get to it

If you haven’t already marked 21 March in red in your diaries, what are you waiting for?

As everyone now knows, this is when the hugely anticipated and somewhat delayed sixth season of BBC One’s benchmark crime series *Line of Duty* returns to our screens.

This may well be the TV highlight of the pandemic – and perhaps the moment we finally

discover the identity – or identities plural – of H.

The producers have pulled off a coup by signing Kelly Macdonald as the latest in a long line of stellar guest stars.

And, by the way, wasn’t it good to see Adrian Dunbar – aka superintendent Ted Hastings in *Line of Duty* – in his civvies, revisiting some of his roots in the recent Channel 5 travelogue *Coastal Ireland*. Breathtaking scenery is an understatement.

### Welcome home, you been gone too long

What do *Little Britain*, *Flea-bag*, *Gavin & Stacey* and *This*

*Country* all have in common? Yes, of course, they are all wonderful, inventive home-grown comedies.

But they also all started life on BBC Three, which the Upside was thrilled to see will return to the EPG as a fully fledged channel next January.

As comedy guru Ash Atalla lamented when BBC Three was originally turned into an online-only operation in 2016, it was as if ‘a 60-year-old man wearing a golf jumper has just walked into a really good nightclub and turned the music off.

Quite. Time to switch the music back on again. Smart move, Tim Davie. ■



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