

March 2024

Television



Netflix's *The Gentlemen*

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From the CEO



The RTS Television Journalism Awards are always one of the highlights of the Society's year. Last month's ceremony was no exception.

Congratulations to all the winners. Full details are published inside.

A big thank you to the jurors and a special thanks to the evening's host, Susanna Reid, whose smile lit up the room and helped to lift the mood in what has been a grim news agenda this past, war-torn year.

Gloomy times demand feel-good television. Our cover story is the new Netflix series *The Gentlemen*, Guy

Richie's reimagining of his own upper-crust gangster movie of the same title.

The Post Office Horizon scandal rumbles on. Simon Bucks provides a valuable media history lesson as he charts how TV news, not least S4C and BBC Wales, doggedly pursued the story long before it led the national conversation thanks to ITV's *The Post Office vs Mr Bates*.

The lack of TV jobs for freelancers, particularly for those in unscripted, continues to affect many people's livelihoods. So it was a pleasure to host an event in which Bectu Head Philippa Childs talked candidly about the crisis and proposed remedies to end the feast or famine TV jobs cycle.

Don't miss Amy Garcia's TV diary – if you thought anchoring a big regional current affairs show was glamorous, think again.

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the RTS Programme Awards. They really will be glamorous!

Following a record year in 2023, the RTS bursary scheme has reopened for applications until 24 June. We are proud to announce that television presenter AJ Odudu is the scheme's new ambassador.

Theresa Wise MBE

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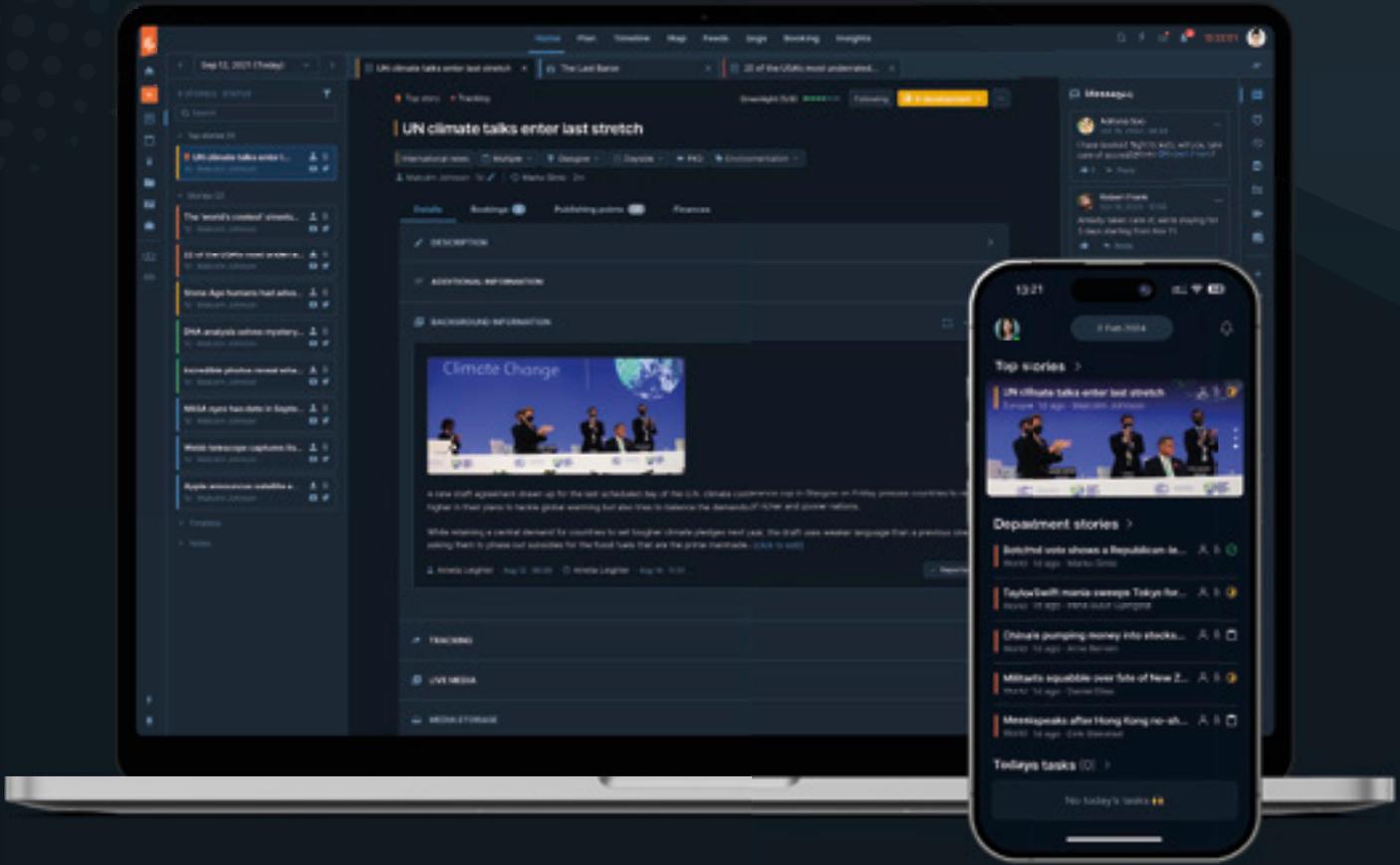
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The awards were presented on 28 February at the London Hilton on Park Lane and hosted by *Good Morning Britain's* Susanna Reid



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TV diary

Home from school run at 8:45am to missed calls from my producer asking me to go to Rotherham to interview a man who is living on a diet of soup and painkillers after losing his teeth 18 months ago.

He can't get an NHS dentist and has been quoted £5,000 to go private. While putting my make-up on at the kitchen table, I listen back to an interview he's done on BBC Radio Sheffield. Ten minutes to prep and get on the road.

When I arrive, the interviewee tells me he's just had a call from an NHS dentist. He's thankful to local media for telling his story. A two-minute package will now be a 30-second update.

Leading the bulletin is the tragic story of a newborn baby found in a pub toilet. As a parent, I keep thinking about the mother at the centre of this.

■ Today we walk to school. I jog the long route back – a rare chance to exercise. A quick look through emails, then the morning meeting.

I have three interviews to prep and do: a Leeds scientist in the Antarctic, from the RRS *Sir David Attenborough* ship (very cool); the Theatres Trust speaking about at-risk theatre buildings; then a quick outfit change (an emergency dress I keep in the wardrobe for these occasions) and an interview with a child genius, which will run tomorrow.

■ Early start for filming in Leeds with a group of primary school teachers concerned about the impact of devices on children. A real eye-opener.

All have the same stories of children unable to regulate emotions, form



Nathan Sandhu/BBC

People who can't get their teeth fixed and children struggling to socialise because of device addiction – it's all part of a week's work for **Amy Garcia**

meaningful friendships and make eye contact. It won't run this week, but I start editing while it's fresh in my mind.

Meeting at 3:00pm to discuss what's on this evening's *Look North*. Prep interview with a doctor on long Covid, our top story. Hair and make-up in 10 minutes flat. Record the interview.

We are short of editors, so I trim the pre-record myself and read through the rest of the scripts. Then it's the 6:00pm headlines before rehearsing different items until we go live at 6:30pm.

■ Day off, kids' clubs, dance rehearsal for "Burrow Strictly Ball", a fundraiser for motor neurone disease research in April. We will be performing at Blackpool Winter

Gardens. Although I danced in my youth, ballroom is very different. Twenty years and two children later, my co-ordination is off and I have octopus arms. The sequin dress is something to look forward to, though!

■ This morning I'm filming at a Rotherham school for my device report. There's a delay on the M1; I'm stuck for two hours so arrive late and flustered. Children as young as 11 tell us they are spending 50 hours a week on a device. My daughter is 10 so I have a keen interest in the subject.

The peer pressure to get my daughter a smartphone before secondary school is immense and something I am trying to hold back on as long as possible.

■ Two interviews to record today – the first on local council funding. There's been a U-turn in Calderdale. A care home earmarked for closure will now remain open. A young man with learning difficulties called Harry is coming to the studio. He has a huge TikTok following due to his extensive dinosaur knowledge.

The studio can be daunting for some guests. I always try to spend time with them beforehand, so they can be at their best on air. He's funny, engaging and shines! Harry's family proudly watch from behind the camera.

It's now 5:00pm, so it's a quick edit of the pre-record, some script reads, then into the studio at 6:00pm until we come off air at 7:00pm. I stay a bit longer tonight to edit some of the school filming from this morning. It will save me a job on Monday.

Home and a glass of wine.

Amy Garcia is lead presenter on the BBC's Look North.

COMFORT CLASSIC



Spiral: Lieutenant Gilles Escoffier (played by Thierry Godard) and Captain Laure Berthaud (Caroline Proust)

Spiral

BBC

The Paris of French crime drama *Spiral* is not the Paris of *Amélie* or – *mon Dieu* – of *Emily in Paris*. There is barely a beret or bistro in shot as the cops fight crime in parts of the city that no tourist dares to tread.

Engrenages (“gears” in French) made its TV debut on Canal+ in 2005, crossing the Channel to BBC Four the following year as *Spiral*.

Over eight series in 15 years, *Spiral* drew a small but devoted Francophile audience to watch Captain Laure Berthaud (Caroline Proust), Lieutenant Gilles “Gilou” Escoffier (Thierry Godard) and Lieutenant Frédéric “Tintin” Fromentin (Fred Bianconi) catch crims.

Matthew Bell embarks on a 15-year odyssey through the mean streets of Paris

Laure and Gilou are the loosest of cannons, Tintin more straitlaced.

All the cop clichés are in place: private lives are messy and police methods are dubious when not outright criminal. The line between *flic* and felon is not so much blurred as erased.

Laure and Gilou, in particular, scream “maverick cop”, but none of this matters, probably because this is France. Somehow, a little police

brutality is OK if it’s followed by a Gallic shrug.

In the cops’ defence, the criminals – drug dealers, human traffickers and serial killers, sociopaths to a person – are no angels. Each of the first three series begins with the gruesome discovery of a body: a woman with her face eradicated; a man burnt to death in a car and a woman mutilated on a railway track.

These are not the crimes of, say, the debonair jewel thief of current French Netflix series *Lupin*.

Laure, Gilou and Tintin hate criminals – as well as police procedure and the bureaucratic French legal system that make their jobs harder – but they have a soft spot for the human debris

Ear candy

Why Do You Hate Me?

of crime. *Spiral* never lets the viewer forget that it is the poor, often immigrant French, that are the real victims; young men with few opportunities in life who are drawn into criminality are sympathetically portrayed.

Spiral is more than a cop show. It also offers (as does the excellent recent film *Anatomy of a Fall*) a fascinating insight into the inquisitorial French legal system, in which the police and judiciary work arm in arm to bring a *délinquant* to justice.

Arsène Wenger lookalike Judge François Roban (Philippe Duclos) is the investigating magistrate, assisted by youthful prosecutors, principally the idealistic if somewhat self-righteous Pierre Clément (Grégory Fitoussi), and the cynical Joséphine Karlsson (Audrey Fleurot).

The French legal system is portrayed as a viper's nest of ruthless ambition, corruption and skulduggery. Judge Roban, though, is a fervent believer that justice must be fair and be seen to be done; to extend the analogy with Arsenal's ex-manager, one could say that he lets his idealism get in the way of achieving results.

Nordic noir has been held up as the beacon of Euro crime drama, but *Spiral* outlasted all its shows.

The New York Times, in a fond farewell to the series, wrote: "*Spiral* has been [*The Wire*'s] equal, or better... few crime dramas have combined as rich a texture with stories as detailed and arresting."

It helps that, with just a few exceptions, *Spiral*'s principal cast were present throughout eight remarkably consistent series. But the two lead characters are its heartbeat: Laure, overly dedicated, feisty, yet vulnerable; Gilou, a lovelorn romantic with a battered face and addiction issues.

The writers, too, should take their plaudits; the scripts were never flabby or sentimental, yet they always had empathy.

It's rare that a long-running crime series boasts a denouement as good as its début. *Au revoir, mon ami*, you were a peerless *policier*. ■

Spiral is on ITVX Premium and Prime Video.

"It's really normal to hate me," Marianna Spring told *The Times* last year in what must be one of the most depressing conclusions to a profile ever written.

She wasn't exaggerating. The same profile noted that, of the 14,488 messages marked for review by the BBC's online abuse monitoring system (between 1 January and late June in 2023), 11,771 were directed at the broadcaster's Disinformation and Social Media Correspondent.

It's a tragic irony of the job that, by investigating cases of online hate you inevitably become the victim of one. And yet Spring refuses to back down from this new virtual front line, ie, her inbox.

In *Why Do You Hate Me?*, published by BBC Sounds, she sets out to put a human face on some of the trolls and conspiracy theorists who infest her inbox.

It gets off to a relatively slow and quiet start. In episode 1, Spring meets Julia, a young Polish woman who, in 2023, set up an Instagram account with the handle @IamMadeleineMcCann.

Shy and softly spoken, she seems genuinely convinced that she could have been the victim of one of the world's most notorious kidnapping cases.

Spring later consults a psychologist, who speculates that Julia's traumatic childhood might have played a part, inducing a "dissociative amnesia" that forced her to fill in the consequent memory gaps as best she could.

But, unlike Spring, the internet doesn't have time for empathy, so many of Julia's more than 1 million

followers subjected her to some horrific abuse.

It's a shame that, after the intriguingly strange premise, the story lacks enough developments to warrant the 30-minute running time of an episode.

Perhaps Spring should have foreseen the McCanns' understandable unwillingness to respond and thus provide what is a noticeably absent resolution. As she says, the last thing they need is

more media scrutiny.

The second episode, *I Believed Conspiracies About the Shooting I Survived*, is certainly stronger for its follow-through. In 2017, Stuart, a Northern Irishman, witnessed first-hand a deadly mass shooting at a Jason Aldean concert in Las Vegas.

But the shooter's lack of a clear motive led Stuart to find solace in the conspiracy theories posted online by the anonymous "Weg", mostly to do with the shooting being staged by the government.

Anonymous, that is, until Spring manages to track down the man behind the account and host a poignant, peacemaking face-to-face. She's arguably lucky to find an unusually rational conspiracy theorist here – Weg is eager to distinguish himself as a "conspiracy researcher" who works solely with factual evidence.

This does beg the question of where you draw the line, or – as Spring puts it to Weg, tongue audibly in cheek, "how to be an ethical conspiracy theorist".

Given all the abuse she gets from "unethical" ones, you can only admire her patience for hearing him out. ■

Harrison Bennett



WORKING LIVES

Music supervisor

Wilderness

Prime Video

Zoë Ellen Bryant works at **Carbon Logic**, and has chosen and cleared music for some of TV's biggest dramas, such as *Wilderness*, *A Gentleman in Moscow* and *I Hate Suzie Too*. The fun part is playing music detective and creating playlists – but there's also the labyrinthine business of negotiating and securing the rights to use the tracks.

What does the job involve?

A lot of things, which is why it is so interesting. It's a balance of the creative – loving and exploring music and putting it to pictures – and the nitty-gritty business of discovering who owns the rights to a piece of music, negotiating fees and getting the music cleared, often to tight deadlines.

It's not all about creating playlists, which is what a lot of people seem to think. It's collaboration with production, research, detective work, copyright law, negotiation, music budget and schedule management, and a huge amount of paperwork, too. We also work closely with composers and music editors.

How musical do you have to be?

You have to love and emotionally connect to music, and have a naturally

good ear, but you don't need to be academically musical.

I didn't study music, although I did grow up with a music teacher mum, learning piano, flute and guitar. I was encouraged to listen to classical music as well as the Beatles and Joni Mitchell, and – via my dad – more obscure artists such as the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band, Iris DeMent and David "Honey-boy" Edwards. An open music taste is a prerequisite.

On certain shows, it would help to be academically musical but, personally, I enjoy the challenge of having to learn on the job and getting stuck in to a specific musical world, whatever it is. For example, Paramount+'s forthcoming *A Gentleman in Moscow* is set in a fancy hotel in 1920s-1950s Moscow, so I've been researching period-appropriate pieces for in-vision pianists, string quartets and jazz trios. Oh, and Russian folk songs for a balalaika ensemble!

Is it difficult to match music to images?

When it comes down to a specific scene, a piece of music needs to work on multiple levels. The mood/instrumentation has to feel right, the tempo has to work with the visuals, and the sentiment and lyrics are also

important. The music should ideally add to what's happening on screen, rather than just sit alongside.

So, yes, it can be a long and frustrating process. Or, you can stumble on the perfect track immediately (and then perhaps not be able to clear it!).

Presumably, older music is out of copyright and therefore free to use?

Not necessarily. It's actually fairly complicated, as there are different rules for the publishing and master recording sides, and laws differ between countries, too.

This job has taught me a huge amount about copyright and music law and, as a company, we're super thorough when it comes to considering "public domain" music. There are funny anomalies and exclusions, and we don't want anything slipping through the net.

What was your route into the job?

I studied illustration at Falmouth College of Arts, but have always loved music more than anything else.

As a teenager, I was obsessed with the soundtracks to Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* and Alfonso Cuarón's *Great Expectations*, and loved the idea of

picking songs for films, but it took me years to figure out there was such a thing as “music supervision”. I was working at a cinema at the time, and the owner knew someone who pitched music to music supervisors.

So I ended up working with her, which was a good insight into the industry, but I wanted to be the person getting pitched to. So, after a year, I sent my CV to everyone music supervision-related in London that I could find and Pete Saville (at Shoreditch-based Carbon Logic) offered me a trial day. I’m still here eight years later.

What was the first programme you worked on?

Adventure-comedy *Hooten & the Lady* for Sky. Each episode was set in a different country, which was a lot of fun.

You recently worked on Amazon Prime thriller *Wilderness*, starring Jenna Coleman...

I did, alongside writer Marnie Dickens, who had a clear idea of the music she wanted right from script stage. The result was a killer soundtrack of assertive female alt rock, pop and rap: Ashnikko, Santigold, Self Esteem, St Vincent, Taylor Swift and Yeah Yeah Yeahs, to name but a few. And a score by Morgan Kibby.

Are some tracks too expensive to use?

There are certain artists we know to avoid, generally, unless we have a healthy music licensing budget. There are also times when our idea of what a song might cost is worlds apart from what a rights-holder is expecting. If more budget isn’t possible, we find alternatives.

Presumably, rights-holders are also concerned about the context in which their music is used?

Yes, and for this reason we’re always upfront about context and scene descriptions in our initial requests.

As an example, Paramount+’s *Sexy Beast* has several dark and violent scenes, so we had to be clear about what the music would be accompanying.

Of course, our aim is to get approvals in place, but we’ve had denials for all sorts of reasons, and that is a writer’s or artist’s prerogative.

How do you keep up with new music?

I’m not quite as “on it” as I used to be when I did radio shows, but I still go to a lot of gigs, and listen to radio



A Gentleman in Moscow

Paramount+

(BBC Radio 6 Music, Soho Radio, NTS). Working above the music venue Village Underground also helps!

What piece of music are you most proud of securing for a programme?

Managing to clear Taylor Swift’s re-record of *Look What You Made Me Do* for *Wilderness* was quite a feat (and certainly not all my own work!). Another that springs to mind is Dario G’s *Sunchyme* in the finale of *Derry Girls*, which was nominated for a best sync award.

What are the best and worst parts of the job?

The best: finding a track that really works well with a scene, and managing to clear it, or tracking down an elusive publishing share after months of detective work. The worst: not having enough time for creative endeavour and/or clearance, or the stress of a denial on a track that a production loves (although we are always prepared with alternatives).

What makes a good music supervisor?

A love and knowledge of music comes first, but you also need to be nice to work with, super organised and proactive, a problem solver,

researcher and detective. You must do the absolute best job you can for the production you’re working on, while also appreciating the value of music when negotiating fees with rights-holders. Attention to detail is also crucial to scrutinise music licences.

What advice would you give to a would-be music supervisor?

Love and learn about as much music as you can (including contemporary film and TV composers), understand the two rights-holder sides, watch loads of good shows and films and have a go at editing music to picture.

What would be your dream show or film to work on?

An A24 horror movie is definitely on my wish list – the next *Rose Glass* film maybe? I’d also love to work on more comedy; something directed by Tom Kingsley or Will Sharpe would be pretty cool.

I’d also love the opportunity to collaborate closely with a writer or director and really focus in on the musical vision. ■

Zoë Ellen Bryant was interviewed by Matthew Bell.



Shilpa Ganatra hears what it was like working with Guy Ritchie on Netflix's new aristo-meets-geezer crime drama *The Gentlemen*

Netflix

The Gentlemen

Upper crust crims

Guy Ritchie's debut film, *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, was a huge commercial hit, a British cockney geezer take on Tarantino that, for good or bad, set the template for laddish Brit movies.

The director is now returning to the world of gangsters but this time for the small screen, reimagining his 2019 movie, the crime action comedy *The Gentlemen*, for Netflix.

With an all-star cast, including Theo James, Kaya Scodelario and Ray Winstone, the crime caper is set in a world where drug barons run secret marijuana farms from the private estates of aristocrats. Much like *Fargo*, another movie-to-TV adaptation, Netflix's eight-parter features a new set of characters who inhabit the same world as the original feature film.

Will Gould, co-founder of producer Moonage Pictures, explains: "Guy

might yet continue the movie. He's always talked about a sequel. But for the TV show, he wanted it to feel like its own thing."

Executive producer and co-writer Matthew Read adds: "A stately home with a marijuana factory underneath felt like such a clear image; [it has] so much story potential. It instantly felt like the story had the legs to sustain a long-form drama."

The series focuses on Halstead Manor, the country pile inherited by

Eddie Horniman (Theo James) following the death of his father – much to the chagrin of elder, wayward brother Freddy (Daniel Ings). Avoiding spoilers, suffice to say that what starts off as a hesitant relationship with the onsite drug gang led by Susie Glass (Kaya Scodelario) turns into an entangled one after Freddy brazenly sets off an irreversible chain of events.

For Moonage, the challenge lay in using Netflix's "good-sized TV budget" to recreate Ritchie's signature cinematic style for television.

The director was only partly involved with Channel 4's spin-off of *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* back in 2000. His role was limited due to his commitment to his next movie, *Snatch*. Arguably, the creative vision suffered as a result. *The Guardian's* reviewer wrote: "Films are cash cows waiting to be milked dry... this attempt is udder crap."

This time, lessons have been learnt. Ritchie has co-written *The Gentlemen*

'GUY IS A VERY CLASSIC DIRECTOR. HE DOESN'T USE A LOT OF TOYS, IT'S NOT ABOUT BEING TRICKSY'

and directed the first two scene-setting episodes, and his fingerprints are all over the rest.

Gould says: “He was really involved in the casting, locations, costumes and edit in a way that really helped the show. He ensured the whole show has his stamp on it – not just his style, but also his preoccupations. He made sure the story was going in the right way and, throughout, had the right emphasis.”

As a result, while the characters – who also include groundkeeper Geoff Seacombe (Vinnie Jones) – are new, the TV show continues the film’s theme of putting the English class system under scrutiny.

TV shows such as *Downton Abbey* and, more recently, *Boarders* tend to highlight the differences between the upper and lower classes. But in *The Gentlemen*, Ritchie emphasises their similarities, especially in their moral codes and motivations.

Says Daniel Ings: “You could even argue that the aristocracy are the original mafia – they hoard their wealth and there’s a closed-off, secretive nature to the exclusive club they belong to.”

Viewers are treated to a range of accents, from Liverpudlian to cockney, right up the social scale to the clipped vowels of the aristocracy. Locations range from council estates and car parks to grand historic manors, such as Badminton House in Gloucestershire, the home of the Duke and Duchess of Beaufort, used as the setting for the fictional Halstead Manor.

Scodelario recalls: “It was awesome, I think we visited every rich old person’s house in England. I kept thinking it was like the ultimate National Trust pass. Our interiors were all shot in a disused Currys warehouse, which wasn’t as glamorous. Customers kept walking on to the set looking for a TV, thinking it was still a Currys. That keeps you humble.”

When it came to creating the story arc, Gould says, “Guy has so many ideas about this world that, as soon as we started talking about broadening out the world of the movie, the river flowed very fast. It became a process of paddling in that river and soaking up Guy’s ideas that didn’t make it into the original film, and finding a new space in which to put them.”

For Matthew Read, scripting the series alongside Ritchie was genuinely collaborative. “Guy and I used to talk a

lot, and then I’d go away and write lots of things down, and then come back and read some out to him, and then we’d continue talking,” he says. “It was that process again and again until, finally, we started putting scenes down. Then we’d read scenes out and then we’d change those.”

During filming, scenes changed on the day as Ritchie perfected the pace. This was challenging for the cast and crew, “but it also creates an energy that is like lightning in a bottle”, says Gould.

Ings recalls: “The script often went out the window. It threw me more on

lookbook. “I can’t tell you what’s in it because otherwise everyone would be able to make a Guy Ritchie show,” says Gould. “But what you realise is that Guy is a very classic director. He doesn’t use a lot of toys, it’s not about being tricky. It’s about great film-making, about the choice of lenses, where you put the camera, how you tell the story visually.”

Though the tone and style appear uniform on screen, when it came to the shoot, the change in directorial style and speed between the blocks “was quite jarring”, says Scodelario.



From left: Joely Richardson, Theo James, Jasmine Blackborow, Chanel Cresswell and Daniel Ings in *The Gentlemen*

Netflix

the days when it didn’t change. Guy really operates on mood and tone and atmosphere: ‘This scene needs some humour here, or some darkness here.’

“As an actor, it’s amazing because you get to give yourself over to it, and trust that he’s the master of this world.”

While the first two parts were carefully crafted with Ritchie at the helm, *The Gentlemen* then moves into more conventional episodic TV territory. Cinematographer Ed Wild, who shot the first block with Ritchie, created a

‘RITCHIE’S
PACE [DURING
FILMING]
CREATED AN
ENERGY LIKE
LIGHTNING IN
A BOTTLE’

“But it was good to see the difference, and work with Guy. When we had a little bit more time, we could discuss the elements, and we could feel how the scene was working – until we realised that we were on a TV shoot and needed to get our days done.”

The series makes the most of Ritchie’s energetic filming style, which should make it stand out in today’s crowded drama market. “It showcases a specific form of Britishness, which works for not just a British audience, but a global audience, as well. And the humour that’s in all of Guy’s work elevates it from a normal crime drama,” insists Read.

Provided audiences respond positively, a second series could be on the cards. Says Gould: “It does have a resolution of sorts, but if people enjoy it there’s always a way for more.” ■

The Gentlemen airs on Netflix from Thursday 7 March.



Justine Evans filming rhinos at a Kalahari waterhole for *Africa* (2013)

Justine Evans

Nature's power to nurture

Harrison Bennett talks to **Justine Evans**, the natural history film-maker and RTS Outstanding Contribution Award winner

Wildlife film-maker Justine Evans recently had a friend visit her home near the Forest of Dean.

As night fell, Evans took them mountain biking through the forest trails, which she regularly does with her wolfdog for no other reason than “it’s quite fun doing it in the dark”.

While they were out night riding, Evans recalls her friend turning to her and saying, “Oh, it’s not all that spooky, is it?”

“It was really weird hearing the word ‘spooky’, because it never occurred to me that being in the forest like that, in

the dark, was spooky. When I’m in nature, I feel safe and nurtured.

“Cities, however, a completely different kettle of fish!”

It’s probably a useful mindset to have when it’s your job to track down and film animals, many of whom might sit far above us in the food chain. Then again, simply listening to Evans joyfully recount some of her many experiences of profound natural beauty may leave you feeling the same way.

She’ll tell you of sleepovers in the rainforest canopy in Borneo while filming gibbons for *Expedition Borneo* (2007), and waking up to their dawn chorus. Or of filming rhinos (who are typically solitary by day) socialising at

a Kalahari waterhole in the moonlight for *Africa* (2013) – behaviour that had never been recorded before.

And even the more brutal stories inspire a sense of existential awe. Evans once filmed a notorious, elephant-predating pride of lions in Botswana as they ate an adolescent alive. It was another “first”, this time for *Planet Earth* (2006), but at one point she had to turn her camera off.

“I was only filming things that were not too graphic,” she explains. She also had to take a moment: “I remember looking up at this amazing starscape in the sky and thinking, ‘It’s all OK, this is just life going on.’”

After half an hour, convinced that

the elephant must have died, she turned her camera back on. But when she looked through the viewfinder, she saw one of the lions lick the elephant across his eyeball, “and the eyeball flinched”.

“That was traumatic,” she admits. But when I ask if these moments of brutality have ever put her off the job, her answer is a resounding “No!”.

“Because then you’d be a complete hypocrite,” she explains. “The brutality we cause our world is off the scale.” You can’t really argue with that, and yet I still think it takes an increasingly rare connection to nature to continue to feel “safe” in the wild.

Evans calls it a “predisposition”. She grew up in Kingston upon Thames in Surrey on a road that leads into Richmond Park and, right through to her teen years, she was spending most of her time wandering its ancient woods and rolling hills, including many nights seeking out the local hedgehogs, badgers and deer. “There was a lot of strife going on in the family home, so, for me, it was a way of connecting to something nurturing.”

By age 11, she was marching against the clubbing of harp seals and knocking on doors for donations to the Animal Liberation Front. At 18, her



Filming gibbons for Expedition Borneo (2007)

Justine Evans

‘THIS IS IT, I JUST WANT TO STAY UP HERE FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE’

secured a spot on a drama-dominated film-making course at Bournemouth Film School. There were no natural history options back then, but the course had the unexpected virtue of being located in Dorset’s lowland heathland, the only habitat of its kind in the UK.

With the habitat under threat, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) came to the School calling for a campaign film on some of its rare

she chose to investigate the Moluccan cockatoo, a CITES Appendix 1 protected parrot that is found only on a few islands in Indonesia, yet it was somehow finding its way to markets in Europe. “And so we went off to Seram Island undercover, because we couldn’t say we were from the RSPB. But we were really shit at lying. I think we might have said we were from the BBC!”

In fact, it wasn’t to be the BBC that gave Evans her big break, but Sean Morris, a founder of Oxford Scientific Films, when he asked her to film the lifecycle of a neotropical tree in Panama for National Geographic.

She still remembers filming in the canopy for the first time, “and just thinking that was the most beautiful place I’d ever been, and, ‘This is it, I just want to stay up here for the rest of my life.’”

That was the first principal camera work Evans had been given; work that, for women, can be hard to come by. Even after completing the Panama film, Evans found it difficult to find more. She remembers that, back then, when asking the BBC for work, “there was always a reason why you weren’t quite good enough. There was never this energy of, ‘Let’s help you go forward’. I remember finding that quite confidence-eroding.”

Around the time we speak, the Wildlife Camerawomen Community had gathered some stark statistics demonstrating the genre’s still overwhelming gender disparity in cinematography roles. The data sampled the latest blue-chip series from multiple companies, including the BBC, Wildstar Films, Plimsoll Productions and Silverback Films.

Planet Earth III, for example, used ▶



Following a family of elephants in drought-stricken Kenya for Planet Earth III (2023)

Justine Evans

long-time obsession with tigers was sending her all the way to India in search of one.

It was on that trip to India that the idea of film-making first popped into her head. After finding a job “vaguely related to media” with a company that ran a reference library for TV ads, she

species. Evans had made her interests quite clear, so the head knew exactly the person to ask.

The RSPB was so happy with her film that, once Evans left film school, it commissioned her to do a film on the illegal wild bird trade. Working with another film-maker, Sarah Cameron,

► 87 male and just four female cinematographers. One of whom was Evans, who filmed one of the series's most devastating sequences, of a mother elephant forced to abandon her son to death by dehydration in a drought-stricken Kenyan desert.

You would think such extraordinary footage, shot by Evans and the few other women working in wildlife cinematography, would put paid to the sexist mistrust. If not, then maybe the Outstanding Contribution Award Evans took home at the 2023 RTS Craft & Design Awards for her 30-plus years of film-making will.

Evans does think there is more awareness of the issue now. In March, for example, the new National Geographic and Wildstar Films series *Queens* will thrust the issue on to a global stage. Evans served as joint series director with Sophie Darlington, and they both mentored some of the younger women involved. "It's basically a female-led production about powerful female leaders in the natural world," she says. "A very long time coming."

In terms of sheer patience, though, the job does call for a certain type of person; nature doesn't just play the hits. "I wouldn't say it's a breeze, for example, going out every day before light, sometimes hiking quite a long way before you even get on to the ropes to climb up a tree. Then you're sat on a platform of not much more than a metre square for 10 hours or so, bathing in sweat. And sometimes nothing happens."

In those situations, says Evans, you sometimes have to adapt the narrative. While in Romania to film its elusive bears and wolves for *Transylvania: Living with Predators* (2001), for example, they were proving rather too elusive, so Evans shifted her focus to the shepherds she was camping with in the Carpathian Mountains, and their traditional way of life.

One of the shepherds gifted Evans one of her most treasured possessions: a hazel-wood shepherd's staff, which he had carved with scenes of flowers and little houses. "That's the only thing they have to protect their livestock and themselves with.

"They'll sort of biff a bear on the head with it when trying to retrieve a sheep that the bear has taken. But it's just a stick!

"So many of them have had chunks taken out of their legs where bears



In Ethiopia filming geladas for *Queens* (2024)

Justine Evans

have bitten them. One guy had holes in his head where a bear had dragged him by his head across the meadow."

After all this unflinching talk of elephant-eating lions and shepherd-biting bears, I was wondering if Evans might ever have feared for her life. "Surprisingly few times," she says.

'THERE WAS ONLY ONE TIME WHERE I THOUGHT, "YEAH, THAT'S IT, I'M PROBABLY GOING TO DIE"'

"There was only one time where I thought, 'Yeah, that's it, I'm probably going to die.'"

In 2003, she was tracking elephants for a BBC *Natural World* through a thick bamboo forest in Mount Elgon National Park, with two rangers from the Kenyan Wildlife Service (KWS). They suddenly stumbled upon two females and their young, who were unexpectedly away from the rest of the herd. One of the females sensed

them and started charging – "She really meant it, she was furious" – and Evans still remembers the sound of the bamboo exploding behind her as she ran.

Until she tripped over.

Luckily, Daniel, one of the KWS rangers, had managed to run ahead and hide behind a tree. "He was pointing his gun over my head ready to shoot this poor elephant." Somehow, however, she managed to pick herself up and throw herself down behind him. The elephant got confused and ran off unharmed.

It's a gripping story, but Evans rightly points out that, by asking such a question, I am only buying into what she calls the "Hollywood" view of nature, that it is somehow "out to get you". After all, the elephant was only trying to protect its young calf.

Because, if Evans has a guiding ethos, it is to instil that same feeling of nature-as-nurture that she has felt ever since those hedgehog-seeking nights in Richmond Park. And, as the climate crisis and the extinctions ramp up, it has become urgent work.

"The natural world is not out to get us," she says, "it is actually a place that we fit into, and should have an emotional connection with." ■

How TV chipped away at Post Office lies

Did *Mr Bates vs the Post Office* have you glued to your TV screen?" asked ITV on social media. The question – presumably rhetorical given the New Year drama's colossal ratings – was plugging an archive clip of what seems to be the first TV news coverage, in English, of the UK's biggest miscarriage of justice. "In English" is important.

Tom Savvides was not, until now, a name you will have heard in connection with the Post Office Horizon scandal. In February 2008, Savvides, then a fresh-faced reporter at ITV Meridian South, was dispatched to the Hampshire village of South Warnborough to cover a local news story with a heartwarming twist.

"This postmistress, Jo Hamilton, had been taken to court for fraud by the Post Office, but no one in the village believed she'd committed a crime, and so they helped fundraise for her court case," recalls Savvides.

"No one we spoke to believed that it was possible for her to defraud the Post Office. They didn't have a bad word to say about her. The story was this sub-postmistress who got out of her depth and didn't realise how the computer system worked properly. She wasn't great at her accounting. That's why she pleaded guilty to fraud, because that's what she was advised to do."

Unsurprisingly, Savvides, like most journalists at the time, was sceptical about Hamilton's account. "We're dealing with the Post Office here, which, at the time, had such a good reputation. So, you don't go down the line of questioning the computer system.

"I remember asking her, 'Where has £30,000 gone? You've been convicted of fraud,'" says Savvides. "She said, 'I don't know. I just don't know where that money is.' So, as a journalist, you're dubious. I thought, she



must have made a mistake somewhere. Because she's been to court, she's been convicted."

Savvides may have been the first English-language TV reporter on the story, but he was well behind Sion Tecwyn, a Welsh-language news reporter for BBC Wales. He had encountered it two years earlier,

when Noel Thomas, an Anglesey sub-postmaster was jailed for nine months for false accounting; the conviction was quashed in 2021.

Tecwyn had known Thomas for many years as a highly respected Plaid Cymru councillor and he was convinced something fishy was going on. "I found it really difficult to ▶

► believe that Noel would have done something like that,” recalls Tecwyn. “I was shocked when he pleaded guilty, because he’d been adamant that he’d done nothing wrong.”

Like so many sub-postmasters whose lives were ruined, Thomas had been persuaded to admit to false accounting to avoid a conviction for theft. Tecwyn was sceptical: “I was covering the proceeds of crime hearing, where they were trying to reclaim the £48,000 they said Noel had taken. And the Post Office barrister said, very casually, ‘Oh, we haven’t been able to find the money. And I remember thinking Noel isn’t that kind of bloke. If he had stolen money, it would be in his bank account. It wouldn’t be somewhere in the Cayman Islands. That piqued my interest.”

Fast forward to 2009, and Tecwyn was the first broadcast reporter to spot Rebecca Thomson’s groundbreaking *Computer Weekly* investigation. Noel Thomas – now out of prison – was among the sub-postmasters named, and Tecwyn seized the opportunity to do his own follow-up. “It was a bit of a hard sell to the producers, because they, quite logically, were saying, ‘Well, hang on – he’s pleaded guilty, how come now he’s saying he didn’t do anything?’”

Tecwyn eventually persuaded his bosses to go with the story, but knew it was vital to do a tough interview with Noel Thomas. In an echo of Tom Savvides’s challenge to Jo Hamilton, Tecwyn asked him what he thought had happened to the money. “He said: ‘I think it’s disappeared into the computer system.’”

Tecwyn’s report ran midway down the BBC Welsh-language news, *Newyddion*, broadcast on S4C, and that might well have been that. Except that his cameraman, Graham Meggitt, was friends with Anna-Marie Robinson, a researcher on *Taro Naw*, a Welsh-language current-affairs show the BBC made, at the time, also for S4C. “Graham told me he had done a story that he thought might make something for us,” Robinson remembers.

Taro Naw translates as *Strike Nine*. It’s a

play on a Welsh phrase, “strike twelve”, which means, roughly, “makes sense”. *Strike Nine* suggests things don’t quite add up, and that’s precisely how the postmasters’ story was looking.

Like Tecwyn, Robinson found some colleagues were suspicious and didn’t see it as a story. “I had no doubts, though, I could tell Noel was genuine,” she says. So, too, could her editor, Geraint Lewis Jones, and a producer colleague, Bryn Jones.

Lewis Jones told his team to keep digging. They joined the dots even more extensively than the tenacious *Computer Weekly*. By the time they were ready to start shooting they had located 36 sub-postmasters in the same predicament as Noel Thomas, including the eponymous Alan Bates in Llandudno and Jo Hamilton 400km away in Hampshire. All had been told by the Post Office that they were alone in having problems with Horizon.

“In the newsroom, they were saying things like, ‘They’ve pleaded guilty, there’s no smoke without fire,’” says Lewis Jones. “But I thought, this is odd: all these people fit a certain profile, exactly the same thing has happened. And the only common thread is this computer.”

Bryn Jones and Robinson had the bright idea of bringing Noel Thomas and Jo Hamilton together on camera, in a scene recreated by writer Gwyneth Hughes in *Mr Bates vs the Post Office*. “I was there, and it was so emotional, even more than in the drama,” recalls Roberson. “I could feel their relief to meet someone else in the same position.”

“We would actually tell some people for the first time that we’ve spoken to others, maybe even that day, and that

would be the first time that they knew they were not alone,” adds Bryn Jones.

The team tried to get the BBC’s national news and current affairs programmes interested. Despite talking to the consumer show *Watchdog*, nothing materialised. “It was partly the guilty pleas, which straightaway were a barrier,” concedes Bryn Jones. “And when you are talking about IT issues and postmasters, maybe it’s not that exciting.”



Mr Bates vs the Post Office

Plus, *Taro Naw* had its own problem: a Welsh-language programme needed most of its interviewees speaking Welsh, and there just weren’t enough to do an immediate follow-up.

It would be another two years before journalist and author Nick Wallis picked up the story. Now universally acclaimed for his passion and drive in highlighting the postmasters’ plight, Wallis is generous in crediting the broadcast journalism which preceded his own.

“The *Taro Naw* programme was so important, building on the excellent work of the *Computer Weekly* investigation. Although I’ve never met the producers, Bryn and Anna-Marie, I interviewed them for my book. They conveyed their sense of excitement as they worked on the programme and told me how they began to realise this





ITV

was such a big story. It remains an excellent piece of television.”

Wallis, then a breakfast presenter on BBC Radio Surrey, found his own regional broadcast champion, the formidable BBC South current affairs boss, Jane French. French helped Wallis produce a powerful radio documentary, broadcast on his own show at 7:00am in February 2011, and on an *Inside Out* TV report the same evening.

An experienced journalist, French had initially been as sceptical as many others but was quickly persuaded by the sheer numbers of sub-postmasters involved. Nevertheless, getting Wallis's documentaries on the air involved intense scrutiny, by BBC lawyers and the powerful Editorial Policy Unit.

“Afterwards, the Ed Pol person discouraged me from doing anything more

on the story,” recalls French. “He was worried that it would look as if Nick was campaigning and had an axe to grind. Looking back, I wonder if I should have fought back harder. But I worked for the BBC and I did as I was told.”

Yet again, the Horizon scandal story might have stalled if it hadn't been for Wallis's determination. The Editorial Policy Unit relented, and Wallis battled on, eventually getting on *The One Show* and *Panorama* and doing a Radio 4 podcast series on the scandal. Wallis also credits *Private Eye* and some newspapers, including the *Financial Times*, *Daily Mirror*, *Sunday Times* and, particularly, the *Daily Mail*, for keeping the story in the public eye.

Taro Naw and *Inside Out* are no more – victims of general cuts in long-form journalism. “The story did illustrate the

value of having regional current affairs offices around the country, which is sadly no longer the case,” says French. “Our contacts across the nations and regions allowed us to quickly realise that there were multiple victims.”

Stewart Purvis, the media commentator and former ITN Editor-in-Chief, adds: “I'm sure there is a BBC explanation about ratings for scrapping *Inside Out*. But that sort of regional investigative tool has been lost. I do wonder whether you need something other than a central news gathering hub to do investigations.”

Finally, back in ITV Meridian, Tom Savvides and his colleagues have something to laugh about. “We have a new video editing system and, believe it or not, it's called Horizon,” he chuckles. “And, yes, it's not without glitches.” ■



End the cycle of feast and famine

Bectu Head **Philippa Childs** highlights remedies to avoid a repeat of the jobs crisis gripping the UK's TV freelance workforce

The crisis for TV freelancers looks set to continue for the foreseeable future. This was one of the conclusions of a sobering lecture given by Bectu Head Philippa Childs to the RTS late last month.

The union leader pulled no punches regarding “the perfect storm” that has engulfed parts of the UK TV sector, especially for those who work on unscripted programmes.

“Industry workers face a particularly challenging environment,” she said. “I’m sure that we all hoped that 2024 would see a recovery, that productions impacted by the Writers Guild of America and SAG-AFTRA disputes would quickly restart and that broadcasters’ commissions would reset.

“It seems, however, that the landscape is much more complicated than that and the impact of the ‘perfect storm’ that Bectu spoke about in the summer of 2023 will stretch far into 2024.”

Last May, Bectu declared an

The slowdown: casualty figures

68% of respondents said they are not working, compared with 74% who said they were out of work last summer

37% plan to leave the industry within the next five years, compared with 24% in September 2023

88% are concerned about their financial security over the next six months

75% said they are struggling with their mental wellbeing

Source: Bectu survey of more than 4,000 people working in film and TV.

emergency in the unscripted sector as work dried up for freelancers.

The below-inflation BBC licence-fee settlement, announced by the Government in December, and the prolonged advertising downturn have led to a commissioning drought that seemed unimaginable back when production was surging in 2022 following the Covid-induced shutdown.

More than 200 jobs are being lost at Channel 4, reportedly 15% of the workforce, while ITV is subject to a recruitment freeze. At the BBC, Tim Davie and his team have made some tough choices, with cuts to flagship current affairs programme *Newsnight* and the axing of daytime soap *Doctors*.

These factors combined with “an increase in the cost of production have taken a huge toll on freelancers who work primarily on broadcaster-commissioned productions. The impact on indies big and small is also very evident,” noted Bectu’s leader. “Progress for SVoDs seems also to have stalled as funding models for streamers have come under similar strain.

“Bectu recently conducted a follow-up survey to one that we did last summer, and the results make for grim reading [see box, page 18].”

Childs said that “perhaps the most worrying statistic of all, and one that should ring alarm bells for all of us, is the increase in the number of people who are planning to leave the industry within the next five years. From 24% in September 2023 to 37% now.

“This statistic is even more pronounced in the unscripted sector: more than half those working in unscripted TV say they plan to leave the industry.”

Childs continued: “At a recent round table that I contributed to, Adeel Amini [a freelance entertainment producer] said, ‘Freelancers don’t figure in broadcasters’ business models or projections. Everyone feels that we aren’t their problem’. I think that is a sentiment that everyone here who is a freelancer will endorse, and something that was repeatedly raised in responses to our survey.”

She added: “The Film and TV Charity’s recent ‘Money Matters’ report highlighted extreme levels of financial vulnerability among industry workers. Almost half were finding it difficult to manage financially; 42% had less than £1,000 in savings; and 71% were pessimistic or very pessimistic about their financial future.

“Our own survey reflects these findings. More people told us they are unable to pay their household bills than in September, and there has also been an increase in people taking on loans or unsecured debt to cover their bills.

“In the spring and summer of 2023, The Film and TV Charity saw an 800% rise in applications for its stop-gap grants from workers experiencing financial need.

“While, of course, these grants have provided a lifeline for many freelancers – and I cannot praise the charity highly enough for all the brilliant work it does to help support industry workers – I think we have to ask a fundamental question. Is it morally defensible for workers in this industry to have to rely on charitable handouts to survive, when film and TV provides such huge profits and contributes so much to the UK economy? Is that sustainable – or is the model broken?”

The pandemic exposed freelancers’ vulnerability as many fell between the gaps of the various government support schemes.

Childs noted: “The term ‘freelancer’ ▶

Life at the sharp end of ‘flexibility’

■ ‘The entire industry is suffering, and the freelancers seem to be at the bottom of the priority list for companies.

‘I got hired to work on a production that has been on hold for a month; the company couldn’t tell me if I would have a job in two weeks’ time but kept asking me to be flexible.

‘The channel refused to engage with us properly and it resulted in a three-week international shoot having to be turned around in three days. I’ve applied for more than 15 jobs in the past eight weeks, only one got back to me.’

■ ‘I feel abandoned. I’ve dedicated my life to this career and overnight everything I’ve worked towards has fallen apart.’

■ ‘I’m scared. A career I’ve worked so hard for – more than 20 years’ experience – as an ethnic-minority working mum... it’s all for nothing. I feel valueless and aggrieved that all those years of working crazy hours and lack of security is for nothing.

‘As freelancers, we’re told it’s part of the risk of choosing this job we’re “so lucky” to have. Yet what do we freelancers have to show for it? Nothing. No pension. No career. No future.

‘I’m starting from scratch in my mid-forties with a mortgage and children who depend on me – thankless. It feels like redundancy without any severance package.’

Source: Bectu workforce survey.



Paul Hampartsoumian

by surprise... The industry is quite disparate in the way it operates. There are pockets of good practice [but] there isn’t enough collaboration and [people] all pointing in one direction...

It’s vital to ensure we don’t lose all the gains we’ve made in diversity.

Q How are you engaging with the broadcasters and how cognizant are they of the problems?

A There definitely is a dialogue... we are talking directly to the broadcasters...

What really concerns me is the solutions the broadcasters come up with, such as giving more money to The Film and TV Charity and providing events and training for people, whereas what freelancers probably want is a more honest and open conversation about what the future looks like, so people can make decisions about their futures.

The lack of openness and clarity is what people find really difficult.

Q There seems to be an openness from the upper echelons of production companies that certain genres are never going to return in the same volume. Is that your experience?

A The BBC has been relatively open that less money from the licence-fee settlement means less production... I think we’re seeing broadcasters relying on tried-and-tested formulae and maybe not being as willing to try new stuff.

QUESTION & ANSWER

Q Is this crisis the most precarious it’s been in the TV industry during your five years at the top of Bectu?

A In a weird way, it’s galvanised the industry to talk about the issues facing freelancers and how they are supported... Yes, it is the most difficult period. During the pandemic everyone understood what was happening and it was recognised that everyone was in the same boat.

What’s been really frustrating for everyone during this period is there probably isn’t enough honesty about what the situation is.

Q Should the industry have been more prepared for this crisis?

A The industry doesn’t horizon-gaze enough and is often taken

► is used rather loosely in this industry, including by us. How people are engaged largely fits into three categories: those who operate as sole traders; those who work through their own limited companies; and those who are on short-term PAYE contracts...

“So many of those who were on short-term employment contracts were not eligible for furlough because of the relevant qualifying dates and so many people who worked through limited companies fell foul of the rules around the Self-employed Income Support Scheme.”

as they are,” said Childs. “I think it’s more than clear that we are at a tipping point. Something has to change.”

In France, a scheme to help those working in the creative sector was introduced in 1936 to help the film business. This is an unemployment insurance scheme for creative workers who receive state-backed financial help provided they have worked a significant number of hours.

“I mention this only because it is a very clear recognition by the French Government of how precarious the creative industries can be. And because

Childs called on broadcasters, indies and Pact to reach an agreement with Bectu to regulate working conditions for unscripted workers.

She added: “There are a couple more initiatives currently taking place that may result in positive change. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has charged the BFI with a project on ‘Good Work’, with an agenda to: strengthen the baseline platform of protection and support for creative workers; drive improvements in management and workplace practices; enhance professional development



Childs added: “The whole question of employment status is one that the Labour Party has said it wants to simplify, if it is elected, so that people are classed as either an employee or self-employed. But changing employment status categories from three to two may throw up more questions than it answers, and the real issue is about rights at work for both employees and freelancers.”

Bectu and its parent union, Prospect, have published with the Community union and the Fabian Society a *Manifesto for the Self-Employed*. It argues for improved working rights, including better sick pay, and for bringing leave and flexibility entitlements for self-employed new parents into line with those of employees.

“We know that many industry workers feel that things cannot go on

it was one of the schemes that worked well during the pandemic when everyone was effectively given a ‘free year’ and were paid benefits throughout.

“The Irish Government is currently trialling a scheme for a basic income for arts workers to recognise the financial instability faced by many working in the sector.”

Returning to the UK, the Head of Bectu said that “the time for warm words and platitudes has passed and urgent action is needed to halt the drain of skills and talent haemorrhaging from the industry”.

Even when unscripted freelancers were in work, things were far from great – “long working days, few rest breaks and a lack of overtime payments, unrealistic budgets and timelines, rampant burnout, to name just some of the pressing issues”.

and progression; and improve creative worker representation.”

In the opening months of 2024, shows such as *Mr Bates vs the Post Office*, *One Day* and *The Traitors* had shown British TV at its best. Childs insisted: “If our industry wants to continue to be the best in the world, and I genuinely believe that we are, then we must all do more to resolve the current crisis and try to address the reasons behind the feast and famine nature of work.” ■

Report by Steve Clarke. Philippa Childs, Head of Bectu, gave a keynote address to the RTS on 19 February at the Cavendish Conference Centre, London. The producers were Sarah Booth and Harriet Humphries. Max Goldbart, International TV Editor at Deadline, hosted the Q&A. Watch the video at: www.bit.ly/RTS-Bectu.

OUR FRIEND IN THE NORTH EAST

With the awards season in full swing, it's always fun to spot unlikely combinations in the bar after the ceremony. Whether it's GB News hacks in gossipy conversation with their Channel 4 counterparts at the RTS Television Journalism Awards or, in the case of the RTS North East and the Border Awards, the founding partners of super-indie Fulwell 73 swapping stories with Brenda Blethyn of ITV's *Vera* fame and super-influencer Charlotte Crosby (who has 14 million followers on social media).

These less predictable exchanges can often lead to entirely unexpected consequences. During my tenure as University of Sunderland Pro-Vice-Chancellor, I recall pursuing Leo Pearlman, one of the founders of Fulwell 73, over many months to persuade him to open a production base in the city – where he was born.

He and his partners had already completed season 1 of their passion project *Sunderland 'Til I Die* for Netflix. So, I reasoned, why shouldn't Fulwell have a base in the city that inspired their name so they might engage with students from the university as well as create more content from this corner of the UK?

Incredibly, and mainly I suspect to stop me hounding them online and in person, they relented. And so it was that in 2021 Fulwell 73 moved into the David Puttnam media building at the university's Faculty of Arts and Creative Industries. Job done, I concluded.

Then, Leo started talking about the idea of opening a studio in Sunderland. Result! I duly put him in touch



University of Sunderland

Graeme Thompson contemplates a game-changing TV and film studio for the North East

with a friend at the city council to look at a potential warehouse conversion. Oh no, says Leo. We're not talking about a warehouse conversion. We're looking to build one of the biggest high-end TV and film studio complexes in Europe!

Fast forward to March 2024 and the detailed plans for the Crown Works Studios are a game changer for the North East. It's a region with many economic challenges, including one of the highest levels of child poverty in the UK, with one in three children being brought up in desperate circumstances. And, let's not forget, places such as Sunderland and Middlesbrough regularly endure the cheap jibes of those living in smarter neighbourhoods. The new Vice-President of Rada, Cynthia Erivo, is only the latest to take a swipe at Sunderland's expense.

So, it's hardly surprising there's so much excitement about the studio plans. It's the biggest thing to hit the city since the arrival of the Nissan

car factory in 1986. Fulwell and partner Cain International have raised £450m to create 20 sound stages on a 155,000m² former shipbuilding site on the banks of the River Wear.

They predict 8,450 jobs and a £330m annual boost to the regional economy, with the first operational studio planned for 2025. To put that in perspective, North East Screen estimates that the whole of the region's screen sector last year generated around £17.8m.

Of course, the project needs significant government investment for infrastructure and skills to make the studios operational. The region has heavily lobbied the Treasury to ask for that support to be included in Jeremy Hunt's March budget. In a display of North East solidarity, four of the region's biggest daily newspapers carried the same message to the Chancellor on their front pages on the same day: "This is transformational. Back our studios."

We'll know by the time you are reading this whether that campaign proved successful. If the Chancellor agrees that the plans are a win-win for the Government as well as the region, the Fulwell team will step up their campaign to woo streamers and studio bosses to venture north to avoid queuing for studio space in the capital.

If Mr Hunt hasn't agreed to make it a priority, the indefatigable group led by the visionary Mr Pearlman will turn their attention to the next incumbent of No 11. Either way, it's always been "Sunderland 'Til I Die" for the Fulwell partners. ■

Graeme Thompson is Chair of the RTS Education Committee and a visiting professor at the University of Sunderland. Season 3 of *Sunderland 'Til I Die* is now on Netflix.

As five scholarship students nervously enter their prestigious new boarding school, mentor Gus – played by the show’s writer and creator, Daniel Lawrence Taylor – offers some wise words: “Don’t be who they expect you to be.” Our leads duly oblige, and that motto applies to *Boarders* itself. Entering unusual territory in television, the culture-clash series roams freely between high laughs, subtle observations and heavy drama, surprising us every step of the way.

Like *Sex Education*, *Derry Girls* and *The End of the F***ing World*, BBC Three’s *Boarders* is a coming-of-age show grappling with the trials of teenage life. Only here, it’s compounded by the promising fivesome – Jaheim (Josh Tedeku), Leah (Jodie Campbell), Omar (Myles Kamwendo), Toby (Sekou Diaby) and Femi (Aruna Jalloh) – leaving their disadvantaged lives in Lewisham behind for the privileged portals of St Gilbert’s School.

Following a press scandal that forces the school to modernise, if only as a PR exercise, the school welcomes our academically promising protagonists, who are laden with street smarts. Their biggest challenge is to crack the school’s cultural code and overcome their stereotypes. “Bro, I’ve already been asked if I sell weed,” bemoans languages ace Toby, just minutes after arriving.

The creator of *Timewasters*, an ITV2 comedy that followed a south London jazz band time travelling to the 1920s, Lawrence Taylor was inspired to write *Boarders* after reading a newspaper article about a group of young black men who were sent to Rugby, one of Britain’s top public schools.

The experience of these real-life boarders resonated with his experience of studying at London University’s Royal Holloway, “which is predominantly white, very middle class”, he says. “My brothers are teachers, and we constantly talk about young black kids in the British education system, so I felt it was something I could delve into. The set-up was also the perfect fish-out-of-water story, and ripe for comedy and drama.”

The six-part series is crammed with storylines that range from the flippant (such as Femi’s high jinks with “The Rah’scals” gang) to the serious, like the attack on Jaheim by arch bully Rupert (Harry Gilby).

Throughout, the drama engages with the complexities of the culture clash,

When cultures collide

A group of inner-city black teenagers join an elite public school in new BBC Three comedy-drama *Boarders*.

Shilpa Ganatra sits in the class



BBC

and what happens when institutions deliver diversity initiatives without structural support. And, in common with Netflix's movie *Saltburn*, *Boarders* gently lampoons upper-class mores. "The wealth gap is getting bigger and the power struggle between the classes has never been more noticeable," says Lawrence Taylor. "Art will always speak to the times."

Boarders' contemporary setting made it an appropriate choice for Studio Lambert, the reality specialist whose most recent hit is *The Traitors*. Explains executive producer Maddie Sinclair: "The way Daniel approaches character and story is to always find that vein of humour, and that felt like an appealing way to get into these topics and themes."

"I saw it as a piece that has something to say, that's a relatable coming-of-age piece, with a very clear premise. It also had that lovely tonal shift of pace from quite intense drama to comedy."

Once BBC Three greenlit the series in February 2022, the production team put together several writers rooms, all led by Lawrence Taylor.

Sinclair recalls: "The writers had all done television work before, but it felt like a training ground. Daniel was a supportive lead writer, and clear what he wanted. It was a very collaborative safe space for writers on their way up."

With their breadth of ages, backgrounds and experiences, the writers took ownership of each character and added depth to the storylines. "For example, you'll see that all the characters deal with the school differently. Jaheim fights against it, Toby tries to exploit it, Femi tries to be a part of it," explains Lawrence Taylor.

Ahead of pre-production last March, Ethosheia Hylton (*Ackley Bridge*, *African Queens: Njinga*) joined as director. Her main challenge was creating a look and feel that reflected the five lead characters.

"When it came to weaving the comedy and drama together, I didn't want to play the comedy, I wanted to play the realism," says Hylton. "The characters are naturally funny because it's all there in the script, so they didn't have to try hard."

"For the dramatic moments, I wanted to go for it, and we made it balance in the edit. We reorganised some scenes to fit in with each other, like we see Femi and Leah making headway with the other students just before we see Jaheim attacked by bullies."

The energetic pace of the camera work is striking, and vibrant colours are juxtaposed against the dark palette of St Gilbert's buildings.

The final piece of the puzzle was getting the right actors on board. Casting director Rosalie Clayton threw the net wide using both conventional and unconventional routes, says Sinclair, to find the best talent. "Sekou came to us from an ad s he put on Instagram. At the time, he didn't have an agent. Rosalie totally got what we were look-

Boarders has all the markings of a show destined to make a real impact.

Says Hylton: "There's certainly a message for anyone who thinks they don't have a place in these schools. And a message for young people growing up in areas with gang violence and crime. It shows that there is another world out there, and you don't have to be a victim to your society."

"*Boarders* also speaks to people caught between two worlds. For example, Jaheim feels a tight hold to his



ing for, so that, by the time the casting tapes came to us, the standard was already high," she says.

The 12-week shoot took place mostly in Bristol, at a private school outside the city. Sinclair fondly recalls a party scene in a crypt. This tested everyone involved as it was filmed at the ungodly hour of 9:00am. She says: "I'd travelled down from London that morning with Stephen Lambert, who runs Studio Lambert, and he was just, 'What is this?'. I remember thinking what a fun job this is, that I can find myself in a club at 9:30am in Bristol."

The result is a series that feels fresh and different not only in its characters and premise, but in the energy it brings to the screen. While it's impossible to predict the lasting effect of a series,

roots and his friends, but he also wants more. I hope that the example he sets of being confident enough to make those decisions comes across."

Arguably, *Boarders* may also help the UK television industry to mature by showing rounded, unsterotypical black lead characters living their best lives regardless of preformed opinions.

Lawrence Taylor says: "There's still a lot of work to be done in terms of putting more black faces on screen, so seeing five young, talented, black kids who are flawed and feel real is quite important. I'm hoping more of this kind of television happens, and this show helps to move the narrative on." ■

***Boarders* launched on BBC Three last month and is available on BBC iPlayer.**

Life after the licence fee?

Manori Ravindran is impressed by a collection of essays on funding the BBC but is disappointed by the lack of diversity in the contributors

If Clive Myrie asks you to close your eyes and imagine a world without the BBC, you do it. It will look a little different for everyone but, for me, there's no *Traitors*, *Planet Earth*, *Interior Design Masters*, *Panorama*, *Ten O'Clock News* and — perhaps worst of all — no *Gardener's World*. Personally, I'm not sure there'd be much point in going on, but others might not even blink.

Myrie, who presents *Mastermind* among his extensive work for the corporation, writes elegantly about this hellscape in the essay "Dystopia: life without a BBC", which also outlines the results of a BBC-commissioned study that deprived 80 households of all the corporation's content and services for nine days. The result was that 70% of those who initially said they'd prefer not to have the BBC, or not to pay as much for it, changed their minds and were willing to pay the full licence fee — or more.

Myrie's is one of 25 essays in the John Mair-edited *How Do We Pay for the BBC After 2027?*, which examines how the UK might fund the public service broadcaster after the current licence fee period expires on 31 December 2027. Mair's book, which is his fifth edited work on the BBC, is an insightful, if occasionally repetitive, meditation on what promises to be a colossal melee for the BBC if it fails to propose a sustainable solution in time.

The licence fee, as so many authors rightly highlight, is an astonishingly resilient relic of a bygone era. The BBC was set up in 1922 by a group of radio manufacturers. Rather than use commercial advertising on air to fund the nascent company, the Government — expertly swayed by the BBC's first General Manager, John Reith — set up

an annual licence fee that was required for anyone looking to own or operate a wireless. The first annual licence fee was issued in 1923 and cost 10 shillings (50 pence), which, adjusted for inflation, would be £38 today. According to media and tech entrepreneur Roger Parry (who pens the rather excellent essay "The BBC deserves better than the licence fee"), by the end of that year, "there were about 200,000 radio licences generating around £100,000 annually".

One hundred years later, and the licence fee endures to the tune of £159 per year, even though most — and certainly the vast majority of authors in Mair's compendium — recognise that a hard reset is essential. The point, for example, that it is a regressive tax (that is, those from low incomes are forced to pay the same amount as high-income households), is made more than 10 times. Something needs to be done.

But what?

There are roughly four solid funding models often discussed, and they include a continuation of the licence fee, a subscription model of some kind, advertising and taxation. Naturally, each has advantages and drawbacks — but some more than others. Advertising is, by most accounts, a non-starter, not least due to the catastrophic ad downturn that currently has broadcasters such as Channel 4 up against it. Parry and others also make the point that the pool of ad funding is limited — and adding the BBC to the mix would be a commercial disaster for rivals such as ITV.

Then, there's subscription, which is a slightly more engaging proposition given the way streamers such as Netflix and Prime Video have already trained audiences to subscribe,



subscribe, subscribe. And people would pay for certain genres, such as drama and sport. But not everyone would subscribe, and it's difficult to imagine subscribers supporting the high cost of news and current affairs, which is the beating heart of the BBC.

There's much discussion of a progressive levy system that might see a fixed percentage supplement added to a council tax or broadband bill. This could — as London Business School professor Patrick Barwise suggests — offer protection from political interference and funding cuts. But the moment you move to a system that generates as much as the licence fee does currently, you can bet there are going to be political challenges.

Perhaps it's not surprising, then, that most authors ultimately land on keeping the basic principle of the licence fee in place, albeit with key adjustments, or suggest a hybrid that incorporates elements from several of the models.

What I would have liked to see more of in *How Do We Pay for the BBC After 2027?* is a greater diversity of perspectives. The book is brimming with authority on the subject of the Beeb and



its future. In fact, most contributors are former BBC employees; one of them, Greg Dyke, is a former Director-General.

But where are the ideas from Gen Z, the next generation of consumers, whom the BBC is falling over itself to cater to with digital-first content? They are the future, they have ideas, and we shouldn't hesitate in seeking their input on the future of their public broadcaster.

Another glaring imbalance: of the 27 writers featured in this collection, just two are women — Maggie Brown, legendary journalist and Channel 4 historian, and analyst Alice Enders, who often finds herself the smartest head in any room. Together, they put forward a pair of the most engaging and intellectual propositions in the whole book.

There are many others who have fierce opinions about the future of the BBC and plenty of ideas about licence-fee reform. Where are they?

Diversity and representation, in general, aren't given the airtime they richly deserve in *How Do We Pay...* and that's not necessarily an oversight by Mair, but perhaps a missed opportunity for the vast majority of authors. Anyone who fails to see the



How do we pay for the BBC after 2027? is edited by John Mair and independently published, priced £9.99. ISBN 979-8875587702

connection between a dialogue around funding of the BBC and the diverse communities the corporation is meant to be serving does so at their peril. Surely, those who feel seen and served by their public broadcaster are far more likely to support its future.

Barnie Choudhury, a former BBC staffer and a lecturer in journalism at the University of East Anglia, dares the reader to list more than 10 hardcore investigations that have had a tangible impact on communities of colour in the past 20 years. "You will fail," writes Choudhury. "The BBC sees the world through a white, male, middle-class lens. It preaches diversity when, in fact, it practises tired stories."

As we wait with bated breath to hear

more about culture secretary Lucy Frazer's licence-fee review, let's remember that the Government has form in making a big stink about shaking up the broadcasting ecosystem, only to turn around and say, "Sod it, let's just leave it."

Despite its dire financial situation at present, last January the Government scrapped plans to privatise Channel 4 after a costly, multi-year battle that saw virtually the entire indie production community and every top film and TV producer support the embattled broadcaster.

Which is to say, it would come as no surprise if, after an awful lot of hand-wringing about the future of the BBC, we land right back at a slightly sexier version of... the licence fee.

Maggie Brown perhaps puts it best in her essay, "Don't destroy something that's working", when she says: "Keep it in place. Tweak it if objective research says that is required. But don't fall for the argument that it is an anachronism. Or support moves that will use the fact it is imperfect to undermine or reduce it to an optional buy-in, destroying the value of a unifying force for good." ■

Could it happen here?

Matthew Bell travels to Port Talbot, where the creators of *The Way* reveal how they developed a series that imagines Wales engulfed by revolution



BBC

Callum Scott Howells in *The Way*

Wales is in flames after a strike at the Port Talbot steelworks spirals out of control, forcing the Driscoll family to flee their home and country. Such is the premise of *The Way*, by turns doggedly realistic and fantastical, but always highly watchable.

The ambitious three-part BBC One drama, which imagines a civil uprising in Wales, is written by James Graham and marks Michael Sheen's debut as a TV director. And, unusually, has the creative input of the iconoclastic documentary film-maker Adam Curtis.

Both Sheen and Graham – as well as cast, crew and many of local boy Sheen's friends and family – were in the audience for an RTS Cymru Wales

screening of the first episode last month.

"Tonight, sitting here in this place with these people, was incredibly emotional," said Sheen, speaking after the premiere.

Sheen first approached Bethan Jones, the producer of *Sherlock* and film-poem *Aberfan: The Green Hollow*, in 2017 with the bare bones of an idea: "A British family being uprooted and having to flee their home. They go on this journey through Britain and then eventually cross the channel."

Finding a reason for the family's flight took the actor to Curtis. Over the past three decades his hallucinatory, and sometimes disturbing, TV series have dissected subjects as diverse as individualism, Islamism, modern culture and Putin's Russia.

"I was a huge fan of his documentaries and the ideas about where power

really lies and what's going on under the skin of society and culture," said Sheen. "I thought he would be really interesting to talk to."

Sheen was so taken with Curtis that he convinced the film-maker to come on board as co-creator and executive producer. The duo discussed writers and came up with James Graham. At the time, the prolific Graham was then best known for his National Theatre play *The House* – which examined the turbulent politics of 1970s Britain – and the RTS Award-winning Channel 4 film *Coalition*, which looked at the formation of the Tory-Lib Dem Government in 2010.

Sheen continued: "At that point, I didn't know James but I knew [that he was a writer who] was brilliant at doing big issues, state of the nation stuff, but all through the prism of real people

[told] with warmth and humanity, bringing the everyday and the extraordinary together. We knew that was what we wanted to try and do in this piece.”

Sheen, Curtis and Graham began work on developing *The Way*, by which time Sheen found himself working with the writer on another project – the ITV version of Graham’s play *Quiz* about the “Coughing Major” who cheated his way to the jackpot on *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*

“I always remember talking to you about [*The Way*] while you were dressed in your Chris Tarrant wig, which was

“It was very exciting for me to war game what circumstances would [lead] to the collapse of a country like Wales and a migration crisis that would come out of that, where the Welsh would become refugees in Britain.”

This story is told through the lens of the Driscoll family. “We always knew that the emotional core of the drama would be... an ordinary family that would go on an extraordinary journey,” explained Graham.

Graham, though, found that reality had a habit of intruding while he was penning the script. “I kept writing



Rahim Mastafa

extra-surreal,” recalled Graham.

It was only at this point that the three decided to set the series in Port Talbot. Sheen recalled Curtis saying that the story needed to be believable, which is why industrial action at the town’s steel works was chosen as the drama’s flashpoint.

The announcement in January of huge job losses at the steel works, which has led to fury and despair in the town, suggests that *The Way*’s premise is far from implausible.

Graham hails from Nottinghamshire, not South Wales but, as he pointed out, both areas have a shared industrial legacy in coal and the 1984 miners’ strike. Indeed, Graham’s superlative BBC series *Sherwood* examined how communities were polarised by the strike.

The “very simple question”, *The Way* poses, continued Graham, is: “Could it happen here?”

“We always think of... uprisings [and] the collapse of a state as being impossible in Britain because we’re so boring and so stable; we’re supposedly the oldest surviving democracy on Earth.

drafts and the world kept overtaking us,” he recalled.

The script imagined a lockdown with people confined to their houses and then, during the Covid pandemic, this actually happened: “We had to upscale the chaos.”

The pandemic gave Graham and his co-creators – helped by numerous Zoom conversations – time to develop the script: “Fundamentally, though, the pandemic... reminded everyone that history isn’t over... We used to talk about, at the turn of the Millennium, the idea of the end of history, that everything that could possibly happen had happened.”

Covid, he said, was a stark reminder “that something can just shift unpredictably without any warning”. ■

***The Way* received its premiere in Port Talbot on 2 February. The RTS Cymru Wales event was produced by Edward Russell. The Way was made by Welsh indie Red Seam, in association with Little Door Productions. It began on BBC One on 19 February and is available on BBC iPlayer.**

Filming in Port Talbot

The cast of *The Way* is a who’s who of Welsh actors, even director Michael Sheen has a small role.

Callum Scott Howells, who won an RTS Actor award for his debut TV role playing Colin in Russell T Davies’s Aids drama *It’s a Sin*, is the Driscoll family’s delinquent son, Owen.

The Rhondda-born actor felt at home on set. ‘I got to learn about Port Talbot and its history. One of the big things for me was filming in Pontrhydyfen, where Richard Burton grew up,’ he said. ‘I learned so much filming here. I feel very lucky and I will always look back on this time with such gratitude.’

Sheen forms a local acting trinity with Burton and Anthony Hopkins – all three actors hail from the Port Talbot area. Howells said he had ‘grown up watching Michael’, adding that his favourite film was *The Damned United*, in which Sheen plays Brian Clough.

So, how was it, being directed by one of your heroes? ‘It was terrifying, but Michael made me feel comfortable, and free and able to express myself in front of the camera. He’s not precious; he really aids performances.’

Owen’s formidable mother, Dee, is played by Cardiff-born Mali Harries (*Hinterland*): ‘I knew who [Dee] was – she’s my mum, she’s my gran, she’s my great gran, she’s a strong Welsh woman who has faced trauma and had a hard life.’

‘The script was extraordinary,’ continued Harries. ‘There’s definite fire in [Dee] – that fire is something that I enjoyed releasing, that fight in us. It made me realise how powerful people can be... if we stand together, we can make a noise and make a difference.’

On filming in and around Port Talbot, executive producer Bethan Jones added: ‘There’s a wealth of talent here and amazing locations... you’ve got everything that you might need within a 45km radius. It was a real privilege to be able to work here and to get to know and work with the community.’



Paul Hampartsoumian

The 2024 RTS Futures Careers Fair at the Business Design Centre, Islington, London

How to make it in TV

More than 1,600 tickets were sold for the RTS Futures Careers Fair in Islington, London, in early February – a record number for an in-person fair. The fair welcomed close to 50 industry exhibitors, while at the CV clinic more than 350 attendees had their CVs tweaked by media professionals and 100 TV experts offered advice in the “ask me anything” area.

Enter the Squid

A dissection of Netflix hit *Squid Game: The Challenge*, a Studio Lambert/The Garden co-production, was the day’s standout session. The show, which has enjoyed success worldwide, was shot in the UK.

In the series, inspired by the drama of the same name, which aired from

Matthew Bell reports from the packed-out RTS Futures 2024 Careers Fair

late November last year, 456 players played for \$4.56m, the biggest cast and prize for any TV reality show. “With the money being so high, it does become life-changing,” said Daisy Lilley, from Netflix’s unscripted team in London, who was part of the commissioning group behind *Squid Game: The Challenge*.

The South Korean drama *Squid Game* – in which the contestants played a deadly game to the last one standing – was a “global phenomenon” when it came out in September 2021, Lilley

said. “It’s rare to find a new series that has such an iconic look and such originality,” she told Kat Hebden, Head of Development at Lifted Entertainment, who hosted the Careers Fair session.

The key, said Studio Lambert’s Stephen Yemoh, one of the executive producers on the show, was to “make a drama into a compelling reality show... we didn’t want it to feel like a damp squib. It [involved] taking the drama world and making it into practical games. It had to feel like the players were in [that] world and were absolutely doing what the actors were doing when they were in the drama.”

Making the show, added John Hay, CEO at The Garden, “took an enormous army of people, on a scale that I’ve not worked on before”.

Production designer Mathieu Weekes, who runs Bizibot Design, said

that recreating the iconic *Squid Game* world was “liberating – it was one of those rare projects where you actually know what it’s got to look like... trying to stay true to and honour that world as closely as you can”.

Lilley said: “It wasn’t just making it look brilliant, it had to be fully immersive for these people to live in and it had to actually serve as home – these people were in there 24 hours a day; it wasn’t a set that they could [leave and] go back to a hotel at night.”

Weekes added: “The immersive thing was the key, [the contestants] had to believe they were in that environment.... That’s what really drove us with the design, [so viewers] could not see the seams, so they got lost in it.”

The casting was done by three teams, who covered the East coast of the US, the West coast, and the UK and the rest of the world. “We ended up with an amazing array of people from all walks of life – people who would not have appeared on other shows,” said Lilley.

It was a hard watch for the production crew when a personal favourite was eliminated. “Again and again, we’d get attached to people but, with a prize that big and the mechanics of *Squid Game*... you’ve got to be unbelievably scrupulously fair,” said Hay.

Impossible to illustrate

In “Filming the impossible: The art of science and natural history”, Peter Leonard, who runs the Science and Natural History MA programme at the National Film and Television School, discussed the difficulties of filming in these two genres.

Making science and natural history television, he said, is “an intellectual and practical challenge.... In natural history, find an animal and film it? Right? Kind of, there’s a bit more to it. Sometimes, things are very difficult to film.”

Film-makers use sophisticated tech, such as the Phantom high-speed camera, which “shoots things at very high frame rates... so you can see things you otherwise wouldn’t see”, explained Leonard.

“With science, you’re dealing a lot of the time with concepts, with ideas, things you can’t see.” Taking astronomy as an example, the former Head of Development at BBC Science explained that the solar system is “too big and too far away” to illustrate

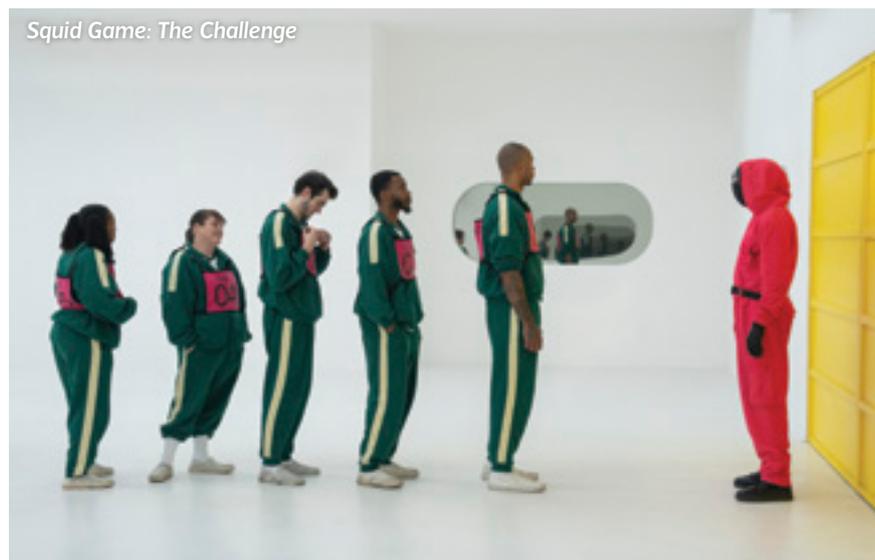
easily. Dismissing “dull diagrams”, he reminded the audience that “television is a visual medium and you’ve got to think of something to explain this stuff”. As an example, he showed a clip from an early Brian Cox series, *Wonders of the Solar System*.

Leonard recalled a *Horizon* programme on the science of laughter with comedian Jimmy Carr, which “we did as a chat show”.

Largely, Leonard explained, science and natural history are two distinct

needed to specialise to work in sport production.

Panellist and sport fan Charlotte Winter, who has a history and politics degree, has been Head of Live Technology at sport specialists IMG Media for the past six months. Previously, when she was working at BT Sport as a production secretary, she had a “lucky break”. She was sent to an Arsenal FA Cup match and “fell in love with outside broadcasts – that transformed my next 10 years. I’m not a specialist in any



genres, but there is some overlap in the areas of conservation, ecology and climate science. “Those things are crucially important... and very difficult to get right. It’s a big turn-off in terms of viewers – people don’t really want to know about the terrible things happening to our planet.”

He added: “There hasn’t been a better time to get involved in these areas of film-making.... It is challenging, you are asked to do things which you might think are impossible until you think about them... but I think it’s a great way to spend some of your limited time on this planet.”

The future of tech roles

There were two other sessions during the day: “Getting your foot in the door”, which offered an outline of the programmes available for new entrants to the industry, including those from the BBC, Channel 4, Mama Youth and ScreenSkills; and “The future of tech roles”, which was hosted by Danielle Neville Reilly, IMG Media’s Head of Production Services.

Neville Reilly asked whether people

way... I know a little bit about every area... but I could never rig a truck... I do need people who can do that.”

Samantha Dunlop, Head of Client Services, Premier League Productions, IMG Studios, started working the autocue and then moved into studio sound and mixing, management and digital transmission. She ran a light entertainment studio and now works in football – “that’s because I know a little bit about everything, I don’t have a passion for football... but I like to understand how everything connects... I love the variety”, she said.

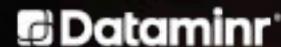
Variety all the way, agreed fellow panellist Dan Walter, Camera Store Supervisor at IMG Media, “but you do have to respect the craft”.

Referring to the huge pace of change in TV technology, he added: “Stay ahead of the game, because it’s changing so quickly.” ■

The RTS Futures Careers Fair was held at the Business Design Centre in London on 7 February. It was sponsored by the National Film and Television School and IMG Studios.

RTS Television Journalism Awards 2024

In partnership with:



The awards were presented on 28 February at the London Hilton on Park Lane and hosted by *Good Morning Britain's* Susanna Reid



Opening shots: *The Gaza War*, *Breaking News*

Reuters

Breaking News

Opening shots: *The Gaza War*

Reuters

'One entry stood out from the rest because, with typical fearlessness, it provided broadcasters... around the world with some of the most striking images, from both sides, as the events of 7 October started to unfold.'

Nominees:

- ▶ **Turkey-Syria Earthquake**, Sky News
- ▶ **Hamas-Israel War** – CNN International, CNN Worldwide

Camera Operator of the Year

Fadi Shana

Reuters

'Fadi Shana was one of a small number of camera operators trapped at the heart of the story in Gaza. His images didn't just bring the horrors of war to global audiences but also the everyday stories of those trying to live through it.'

Nominees:

- ▶ **Olivia Prutz**, Sky News
- ▶ **Mstyslav Chernov**, The Associated Press

Current Affairs – Home

Russell Brand: *In Plain Sight* – *Dispatches*

Hardcash Productions for Channel 4
'Through the brilliant use of archive and carefully judged interviews, this was a painstaking investigation into the alleged abusive activities of a well-known celebrity. A brilliantly told story that had real impact.'

Nominees:

- ▶ **Catching My Rapist** – *Exposure*, Bite Films for ITV1
- ▶ **A Time to Die** – *Exposure*, True Vision for ITV1



Kirsty Wark,
Outstanding Contribution

Outstanding contribution

Kirsty Wark

‘Let’s be clear, this is not a retirement award; nevertheless, it does mark an end, later in the year, to 30 years presenting one of the crown jewels of British broadcasting – *Newsnight*.

‘One of Kirsty Wark’s early landmark interviews put Margaret Thatcher on the spot over the poll tax and her popularity – or lack of it – in Scotland. On the subject of Scotland, Kirsty has always managed to champion reporting in her own country and be equally at home in Westminster, Cardiff or abroad.

‘In the *Newsnight* chair she has seen off eight prime ministers and 10 different programme editors. Her colleagues speak of her boundless enthusiasm and formidable breadth of knowledge, while at the same time being collaborative and nurturing to her younger colleagues, many of whom have benefited from her mentorship and guidance.

‘On screen, she is unflappable, asks penetrating and tough questions when necessary and acts with empathy and compassion when needed.’

Richard Kendall

Current Affairs – International

Rescue Mission Gaza – Witness

Al Jazeera English

‘Many of the more than 20 entries demonstrated extraordinary bravery and initiative. The winner was a great example of on-the-ground, up-close storytelling from the front line.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **The Grave – Exposure**, Studio 9 Films for ITV1
- ▶ **Inside Russia: Traitors and Heroes – Storyville**, BBC World Service for BBC Four

Emerging Young Talent of the Year

Joshua Stokes – Summerland: The Forgotten Disaster – Granada Reports

ITV News Granada for ITV1

‘The winner stood out due to the deep research that went into this story, the resourcefulness with which it was pursued, and the emotional power of the storytelling.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **Yousef Hammash – Channel 4 News**, ITN for Channel 4
- ▶ **Ruben Reuter – Channel 4 News**, ITN for Channel 4

Innovation Award

Westminster Accounts

Sky News and Tortoise Media

‘A real example of public service journalism that opened up an opaque world, was innovative and made it available to everyone – absolutely vital to democracy.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **5G Private Network at the Coronation – BBC News**, BBC News/BBC R&D/Neutral Wireless for BBC News Channel
- ▶ **BBC Verify – BBC News**, BBC News for BBC One, BBC News Channel and BBC social media ▶

Nations and Regions Factual

Welsh Rugby Under the Spotlight – Wales Investigates

BBC Wales for BBC One Wales

‘A textbook example of rigorous investigative journalism. An impressive body of evidence was built up and developed for a powerful programme that had an immediate and lasting impact on a national institution.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **The Dog Dealers – Disclosure**, BBC Scotland for BBC One Scotland
- ▶ **I Spy – Spotlight**, BBC Northern Ireland for BBC One Northern Ireland

Nations and Regions News

The Nottingham Attacks – ITV News Central (East)

ITV News Central for ITV1

‘Outstanding for the way the [production] team dealt with the pressures of a major breaking story. [They were] obviously rooted in the local community and covered all the angles.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **STV News at Six (North)**, STV News for STV
- ▶ **Who Cares for the Carers? – ITV News Meridian**, ITV News Meridian for ITV1

Nations and Regions Reporter of the Year

Jonathan Brown – Knife Crime Investigation – ITV News Calendar

ITV Yorkshire for ITV1

‘This entry showed how persistence, deep community contacts and thorough journalism could shed light on one of the scourges of our times.’

Nominees:

- Gareth Wilkinson – UTV Live**, UTV
- Antoine Allen – ITV News London**, ITN/ITV News for ITV1

Network Daily News Programme of the Year

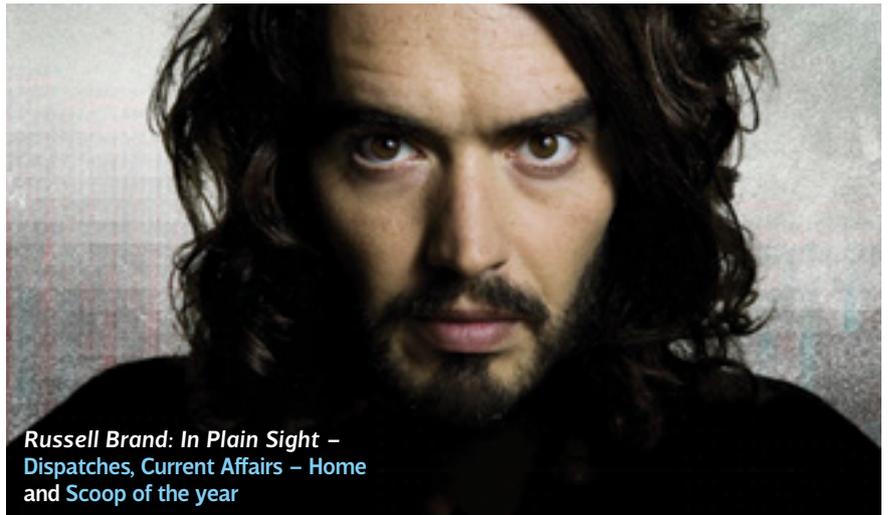
Channel 4 News

ITN for Channel 4

‘One programme stood out for the distinctive way it reported on stories in the UK and abroad – particularly the Israel-Gaza conflict, [allied to] its mission to explain as well as report.’

Nominees:

- ▶ **News at Ten**, ITN/ITV News for ITV1
- ▶ **BBC News at Ten**, BBC News for BBC One



Russell Brand: In Plain Sight – Dispatches, Current Affairs – Home and Scoop of the year

Channel 4



Fadi Shana, Camera Operator of the Year

Reuters



Jonathan Brown – Knife Crime Investigation – ITV News Calendar, Nations and Regions Reporter of the Year

BSkyB



Westminster Accounts, Innovation Award

BSkyB



Rescue Mission Gaza – Witness, Current Affairs – International

Al Jazeera



1 *Joshua Stokes – Summerland: The Forgotten Disaster*, Emerging Young Talent of the Year

2 *Christiane Amanpour interviews Siamak Namazi*, Network Interview of the Year

3 *The Nottingham Attacks – ITV News Central (East)*, Nations and Regions News

4 *Welsh Rugby Under the Spotlight*, Nations and Regions Factual

5 *Opening shots: The Gaza War*, Breaking News

6 *Susanna Reid – Good Morning Britain*, Network Presenter of the Year

7 *Sky News*, News Channel of the Year

8 *Rescue Mission Gaza – Witness*, Current Affairs – International

9 *Nowhere to Go: Britain's Homeless Emergency* – ITV News, News Coverage – Home

All pictures: Richard Kendal



Christiane Amanpour
interviews Siamak Namazi,
Network Interview of the Yea

CNN



Susanna Reid –
Good Morning
Britain, Network
Presenter of
the Year



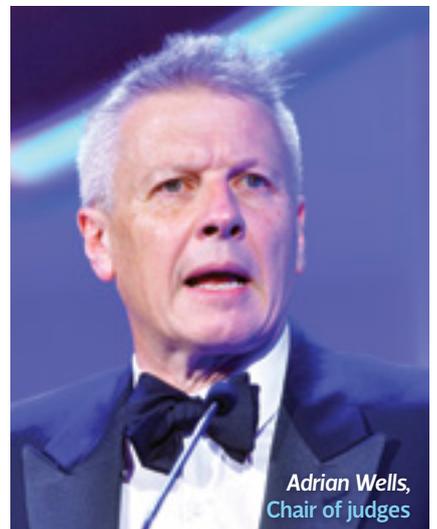
Channel 4 News, Network Daily
News Programme of the Year

Channel 4



Secunder
Kermani –
Channel
4 News,
Network
Television
Journalist
of the Year

Richard Kendal



Adrian Wells,
Chair of judges



Martin Lewis CBE,
RTS Special Award

Richard Kendall

Special Award

Martin Lewis CBE

‘He is credited with changing the face of an entire genre of journalism on British television. Through multiple appearances on many different programmes on many channels and also on his own groundbreaking prime-time show, he has provided unique insights and assistance to millions.

‘He has championed those

suffering from the effects of the cost-of-living crisis and saved thousands of consumers something that matters a lot: hard-earned cash.

‘He is always meticulous, insightful and gives his audience clear and actionable advice. He has also managed to influence government policy and hold the banking and utility industries to account.’

Network Interview of the Year

Christiane Amanpour interviews Siamak Namazi

CNN Worldwide

‘Securing the interview was a coup. The informed and considered questioning, coupled with the production decision to let the interviewee’s words speak for themselves, heightened the drama and the impact.’

Nominees:

▶ **Harry: The Interview – Stand Alone**, ITN Productions for ITV1

▶ **BBC’s Lucy Williamson interviews Andrew Tate – BBC News**, BBC News for BBC One

Network Presenter of the Year

Susanna Reid – Good Morning Britain

ITV Studios for ITV1

‘Unflappable, charismatic, with a great ability to connect with viewers and equally at home in the studio or reporting from war zones, Susanna Reid is a charming assassin in the face of politicians who refuse to answer a straight question.’

Nominees:

▶ **Laura Kuenssberg – Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg, Laura Kuenssberg: State of Chaos**, BBC News for BBC One and BBC Two

▶ **Matt Frei – Channel 4 News**, ITN for Channel 4

Network Television Journalist of the Year

Secunder Kermani – Channel 4 News

ITN for Channel 4

‘This journalist’s work is threaded with empathy while retaining balance in the most challenging of circumstances; he edged out some of the best in our business with the quality of his work.’

Nominees:

▶ **Paul Brand – ITV News**, ITN/ITV News for ITV1/ITVX

▶ **Orla Guerin – BBC News**, BBC News for BBC One ▶

News Channel of the Year

Sky News

'Impressive for the comprehensive way it covered the main news stories of the year, not just the developments in the Middle East and in Westminster, but also a wide range of other events.'

Nominees:

- ▶ Al Jazeera English
- ▶ BBC News Channel

News Coverage – Home

Nowhere to Go: Britain's Homeless Emergency – ITV News

ITN/ITV News for ITV1

'Daniel Hewitt's reports and analysis on the growing homeless crisis were moving as well as shocking. His reports on this hidden crisis and the reasons for it, have had significant impact – leading to changes in the treatment of private renters.'

Nominees:

- ▶ Lucy Letby: *Catching a Child Killer* – ITV News, ITN/ITV News for ITV1/ITVX
- ▶ *Challenging Police Culture* – Channel 4 News, ITN for Channel 4 News

News Coverage – International

War in Ukraine: Hope, Death and Defiance – BBC News

BBC News for BBC One

'In a year riven by conflict, the BBC maintained its commitment to a story that demands resources and bravery from its journalists and delivered depth, diversity and consistency.'

Nominees:

- ▶ Myanmar: *Hidden War*, Sky News
- ▶ Israel-Gaza War – BBC News, BBC News for BBC One and BBC News Channel

On-Demand Journalism

Stealing Ukraine's Children: Inside Russia's Camps – VICE News

VICE UK – YouTube/VICE News

'A film built upon extraordinary and unique access to a contemporary horror. The treatment was calm and measured, and attempted to hold to account those with absolute power over vulnerable lives.'

Nominees:

- ▶ Endometriosis: *My Search for a Cure* – Off Limits, Sky News
- ▶ *Adrift* – APNews.com, The Associated Press



BSkyB



ITV

Daniel Hewitt – ITV News, Specialist Journalist of the Year



ITV

Nowhere to Go: Britain's Homeless Emergency – ITV News, News Coverage – Home



Russell Brand: In Plain Sight – Dispatches, Scoop of the Year and Current Affairs – Home

Richard Kendal

Political Journalist of the Year

Beth Rigby, Political Editor

Sky News

'Her work is... always exciting to watch and her packaging is excellent, she is always asking the questions we are all yelling at the telly. She does a great democratic service – a political editor at the top of her game.'

Nominees:

Colin Mackay, STV News for STV

Sam Coates, Deputy Political Editor, Sky News

Scoop of the Year

Russell Brand: In Plain Sight – Dispatches

Hardcash Productions for Channel 4

'The most extraordinary piece of television seen all year and truly shocking. It was a massive achievement to get it to air. The interviews with victims were hugely uncomfortable to watch because of how graphic and intimate they were; the way they were intercut with his comedy was jaw-dropping.'

Nominees:

▶ **Dr Ravi Jayaram – The Doctor Who Caught a Killer – ITV News**, ITN/ITV News for ITV1/ITVX

▶ **Baby Formula: A Hidden Crisis**, Sky News

Specialist Journalist of the Year

Daniel Hewitt – ITV News

ITN/ITV News for ITV1

'A great crafter of television [who delivers] compelling storytelling, stunning scripting and heartbreaking human testimonies. A journalist who earns the trust of those he is talking to.'

Nominees:

▶ **Jason Farrell, Home Editor**, Sky News

▶ **Nick Martin, People & Politics Correspondent**, Sky News



Stealing Ukraine's Children: Inside Russia's Camps – VICE News, On-Demand Journalism

Richard Kendal



Beth Rigby, Political Editor, Political Journalist of the Year

Richard Kendal



War in Ukraine: Hope, Death and Defiance – BBC News, News Coverage – International

BBC



Watch the full video of the RTS Television Journalism Awards 2024, at: bit.ly/RTS-TVJ24

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‘d like viewers to get either a window into a world they don't know much about or a mirror where they see themselves reflected ... I want people to be moved, feel connected and maybe feel a little less alone.’

This was one of Stef Smith's aims for her BBC Scotland/Screen Scotland short-form digital drama *Float*. The first series won Smith an RTS Writer award. Series 2, which launches on iPlayer at the end of this month, was premiered at an RTS Scotland/BBC Scotland event in late February.

Told in 10-minute episodes – six per series – *Float* is the sweet, sensitive, sensual love story of two young women in a tiny, secluded Scottish seaside town. “[Gay people] do exist outside of urban centres,” said Smith, laughing.

Although she insisted that the characters being gay “is just a part of them. It's about allowing people not to be defined by the one sole aspect of the way in which they are marginalised”.

The project initially began in response to a call-out by BBC Writersroom Scotland for ideas that could work as an online drama. “Eight of the pitches were taken to treatment, four of those to pilot stage and *Float* was the one chosen to go to full series,” said Smith.

Co-founder and producer of Scottish indie Black Camel Pictures, Arabella Page Croft, who directed the drama, said: “We were all really proud of [*Float*] and I wanted to get it out into the world.”

This she did, with *Float* winning the Short Formats prize at French international festival *Séries Mania*, which led to it being snapped up for distribution on Canal+. She was amazed that “young people had travelled a long way from remote villages



Float: Hannah Jarret-Scott (Jade) and Jessica Hardwick (Collette)

BBC Scotland

RTS Scotland Carole Solazzo hears how the lesbian love story *Float*, now in its second series, was brought to the screen

around Lille” to watch the show. She credited this partly to the hand-held camerawork of Alan C McLaughlin. “It was a low-budget commission and we had a tiny crew. I knew Al’s work to be close-up and personal,” said Page Croft.

Hannah Jarrett-Scott, who plays the central character, Jade, said the drama’s look explained some of the appeal to those French audiences: “Al’s camerawork is very French, with the long intimate scenes and rural shots.”

“The location became a character,” continued Page Croft. Filming took place on the west coast in Helensburgh and Gourock, as well as the “beach with trees at Inverkip, which felt magical”.

Later, the swimming pool, where much of the first series was filmed, was demolished. “Black Camel had the nous to

film the demolition a year before we got the commission for the second series,” Smith remarked. It became a metaphor for the journey of the other main character, Collette.

Series 2 widens the world with extra characters, including the girls’ mums. “Seeing the women these young women came from was important,” said Smith. “Mother-daughter relationships are unique.”

“There is always going to be a battle there,” Jarrett-Scott suggested. “It’s scary, coming out. Coming out to anyone.”

“Lots of parents have questions about their children coming out,” Smith admitted. “Not from a place of hate. From a place of fear. [They’re wondering:] ‘Has my child just made their life harder when life’s already so hard at the moment?’”

She also created new

character Theo, not just to add to the humour, but also “to represent a force for positivity... queer characters are so often given tragic narratives,” said Smith. “[Representation] has got better, but there’s still work to be done.”

“We talk about this all the time,” Page Croft agreed. “In development and in what we’re pitching. The world is hungry for more queer content in an ordinary, accessible way... At Black Camel, we’ve always endeavoured to make commercial work, and this... takes these stories much further than before. Let’s do more.” ■

The RTS Scotland/BBC Scotland event was held at the Grosvenor Picture Theatre, Glasgow, on 21 February, hosted by BBC journalist Fiona Stalker and produced by BBC Scotland Head of Communications Dawn Hill.

‘**W**hat Lisa [Squire] wanted was for us to get this message across: you should always report non-contact sexual offences. Because it does make a difference.’ Candour Productions’ Anna Hall was speaking at an RTS Yorkshire event on 31 January – five years to the day that Squire’s daughter Libby was abducted, raped and murdered in Hull.

Just how this reporting makes a difference becomes clear during Humberside Police’s hunt for Libby’s killer, in Candour’s powerful Bafta-winning, three-part series *Libby, Are You Home Yet?*

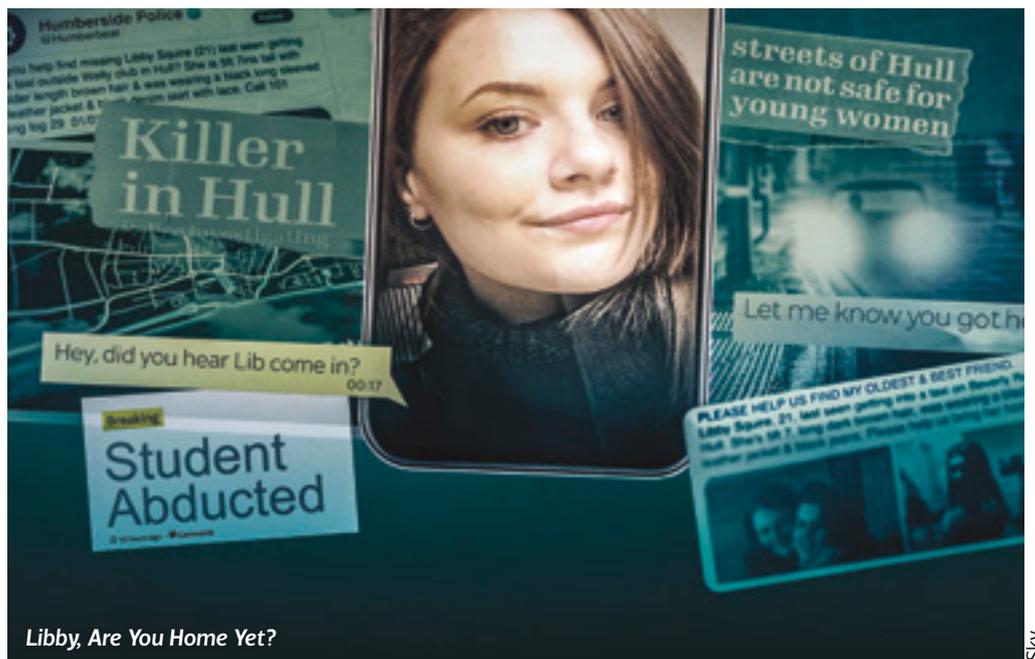
The Leeds-based company’s documentary became “the fastest binged series in Sky Crime history”, said Hall, who was both director and executive producer.

“The climate is very difficult at the moment, but we had a fantastic conversation with the female-led Sky Documentaries team,” she continued. “A lot depends on the relationship you have with your commissioning editor. You have to find people with the synergy you want, the same values, the same ambition.”

Hall emphasised: “It’s really important where, as a company, we place ourselves [on the spectrum of] true crime. For us, it’s about... highlighting important issues, treating the material with the utmost respect, and it’s about working with integrity, because you could so easily have made a sensationalist film.

“We were absolutely telling the story through the lens of the police, Libby and her family.” And without voice-over commentary.

“That was all Libby [at the start of the programme],” editor Luke Rothery agreed. “We really wanted to have her voice through it.” That proved challenging because there wasn’t much video of her.



‘Respect and integrity’

RTS Yorkshire Carole Solazzo discovers how Candour’s award-winning documentary *Libby, Are You Home Yet?* was made

Rothery continued: “The selecting of her favourite songs... was key. She’s our hero... We don’t come in on the drama of that night. With backstory, you’ve got the chance to make the viewer fall in love with her.”

Crucial to this, Rothery said, was “finding anecdotes that bring her to life”. These were supplied by Libby’s friends and family, who were interviewed by Hall and series producer Josie Besbrode.

“Having Lisa [on board] was a huge way in,” Besbrode said. “For ethical reasons, I’d never cold call somebody. I’d go through Lisa to ask if they’d be happy for me to contact them... No pressure... they must have their own reasons for wanting to talk.”

This had to be handled delicately. “Libby’s friends were so young and deeply traumatised by what had

happened,” Hall explained. “We always offer support and counselling as part of making these films... We are conscious that it’s re-traumatising to tell these stories.”

Hall decided there would be no direct contact with Libby’s killer. Instead, “we wanted to bring the audience along with us,” she said. “To help them feel the fear of what was going on... that there’s a prowler on the loose... To create a sense of unease.”

CCTV footage of killer Pawel Relowicz – “a prolific sex offender” – was included. As was a graphic listing his offences, most of which had taken place in the streets where Libby lived.

From those contained streets to “the foreboding presence of the River Humber... shot in wide screen because we had these

massive vistas”, Hall wanted the locations, too, “to be a character in the narrative”.

Six weeks after her murder, “in a one-in-a-trillion chance, according to police”, Rothery recalled, Libby’s body, containing forensic evidence linking her to Relowicz, was found in the river.

“The police... had followed up the reported non-contact sex offences, so they had Relowicz’s DNA in their system, although they didn’t have Relowicz,” Hall explained. “So when they arrested him... they took his DNA and it ‘pinged’ for all these other offences.”

“We hope, as we’re taking the audience with us, they understand that bit’s important,” she concluded. ■

The RTS Yorkshire event was held at HEART in Leeds on 31 January. It was hosted by Fiona Thompson and produced by Jane Hall.

When director Ashley Francis-Roy and his team set out to make *To Catch a Copper*, no one could have predicted what the finished series would look like, nor the cases that would emerge in Avon and Somerset Police's Counter-Corruption Unit.

"We started with a huge amount of openness," said Francis-Roy, following an RTS screening of episode 2 in Bristol, the city where many of the incidents in the three-part series took place.

"The context was very different when we started in 2020. *Line of Duty* was a huge hit on television; George Floyd had been murdered; but there wasn't the same intense scrutiny of policing that there is now and has been in the past couple of years."

One huge development since filming began was that, in June last year, Chief Constable Sarah Crew admitted that she believed her force to be institutionally racist. Now that this series, which was made by Story Films, is out on Channel 4, Crew hopes it can provoke further discussion within the organisation.

"I will always open the doors as wide as I can," Crew assured the audience at the Everyman Bristol, speaking about her willingness to open the police up to scrutiny. "The films present back to me my organisation in a



To Catch a Copper

Channel 4

Real-life Line of Duty

West of England Channel 4 series *To Catch a Copper* asks hard questions about police corruption. **Seraphina Allard-Bridge** reports

way that I haven't seen it before – and me, in a way I haven't seen myself before.... It gives a picture of institutional racism."

Fellow police officers joined Crew on the panel and in the audience, as well as community leaders from Bristol.

"I was taken aback by what I saw," said Commander Mark Runacres of Bristol Police, who was shocked to see how the issues were dealt with within his own force.

Desmond Brown, Chair of Avon and Somerset Police's Lammy Group and advocate

for racial justice, added that he felt, "appalled, angry, but, unfortunately, not surprised".

"These have been things in UK policing for as long as I've been alive and they don't seem to be going anywhere."

The series was difficult to make. "One of the big experiences we had making this was that these incidents happened, and you would see [that] the response in the community... was a million miles away from... the police response," explained Francis-Roy.

"Victims get incredibly dissatisfied and lose faith in the system. Charlotte, Reon's mum [from episode 2], was unable to make a complaint in the end because she... knew it was a pointless exercise."

It is hard to watch the show without wondering how these issues are going to be solved. When asked by the event host, the historian and broadcaster David Olusoga, every member of the panel agreed that the systems in place are unfit for purpose.

"The IOPC [Independent Office for Police Conduct] is

the one that really ... sticks in my throat, actually," said Bristol City Councillor and Deputy Mayor Asher Craig. "They are marking their own homework. ... Who polices them? Who scrutinises them?"

Could a series like *To Catch a Copper* have a real impact?

"A film like this is so important, because you can't deny that the facts are there," said Brown, who encouraged members of the community to get involved. "This is fertile ground to get things changed, but if we're not going to take part, we won't get the police force that we want or deserve."

"What am I going to do?" Crew asked, prompted by a question from the audience. "I'm going to let cameras in, I'm going to let people see and I'm going to start a debate about change, and I think, with the help of the film-makers, we've started to do that." ■

The Channel 4/RTS West of England event was held at the Everyman Bristol on 5 February.



To Catch a Copper

Channel 4

Norwich boost for film-makers

RTS East In late January, “Norwich film people” drew a standing-room-only audience of 100 creatives from across the RTS East region to Norwich’s Cinema City. It followed a similar event in Cambridge last October and provided a

platform for the regional film community to hear firsthand from their peers about best practice and the challenges of working in film.

RTS East Vice-Chair and MD of Eye Film Charlie Gauvain welcomed eight speakers, including BBC

commissioner Diana Hare, ScreenSkills’ Celia Small and RTS Chair Rachel Watson.

In five-minute slots, speakers were able to highlight a project, or offer advice on entry routes and upskilling opportunities within the screen industry.

A range of creatives attended, from students starting out in their careers to veterans. As well as facilitating an exchange of ideas and experiences, the event helped to showcase the talent working in a region often overlooked by broadcasters.

At a time when the industry is proving tough for many, RTS East plans to host similar events every three months.

RTS London The day before filling a panellist’s chair at the RTS National Event “2024 TV predictions”, in late January, media universe cartographer and analyst Evan Shapiro appeared solo at a sold-out RTS London session.

“Content remains king – that’s not going to change,” he told a rapt Everyman King’s Cross audience. However, he added, there is a misperception “that most television watched on Earth is streaming – it’s just not true”.

In the US, more than half of viewing is still on broadcast or cable TV; in the UK and Europe, the figure is higher, because of their older populations and the “amount of free content you all make in your socialist countries”, he joked.

But Shapiro said that broadcasters have to do far more to attract younger viewers, who are wedded to YouTube, not traditional TV. “They’re not going to age into watching broadcast television,” he said, calling on public service broadcasters (PSBs) to “get on to YouTube, TikTok and Snap”.

As well as boosting audiences, the PSBs will be providing “fair and honest, trustworthy, quality journalism on social video”. If they don’t, he warned, they would be “ceding those platforms to the bad actors... [spreading] misinformation”.

“Understand your viewers,” he commanded. “If you’re



Evan Shapiro

John Stone

A warning from the US media

making decisions about your product without people in the room who are under the age of 40, you’re going to lose touch with reality?”

He warned the UK TV

industry to take a look at the “media apocalypse” in the US, “because you have time to... avoid the bad decisions that some of the media companies made” there.

“Paramount is on the block,” he said. “Apple could afford to buy it for the change [behind CEO] Tim Cook’s couch cushions.

“I don’t imagine Warner Bros., or Disco Brothers as I call them, will last as a stand-alone company much longer than a year.... I think Disney will ultimately sell, unless something changes dramatically about the trajectory of that company.

“It shows that, no matter how valuable your IP is, if you don’t have a really good business strategy, it doesn’t matter.”

Turning to artificial intelligence, Shapiro said that it is far less suited than human beings to fulfil a creative role: “The flaws that make people human make art different to something that a computer can generate.”

The “biggest use case for AI”, he continued, would be felt behind the scenes, doing “the weird back-office stuff, the engineering of... and discovery [of TV]... to allow every environment that I go into to be personalised for me... not in writing screenplays and playing roles in films.”

“An evening with Evan Shapiro” was held at the Everyman King’s Cross on 29 January. The RTS London event was chaired by Sarah Clarkson, Head of Intelligence and Insight at Channel 4, and produced by Phil Barnes.

Matthew Bell

BBC Scotland crime drama *Shetland*, which celebrated its first decade on screen last year, was put under the spotlight at an RTS Scotland event in February.

The event was held in partnership with the Bring the Drama Festival, which complements the six-part BBC Two talent show *Bring the Drama*, fronted by Bill Bailey. The festival opens up the world of drama to people interested in a career on screen or stage.

Key crew members discussed how they contribute to the success of *Shetland*, which is made by ITV Studios company Silverprint Pictures.

For last year's eighth series, Ashley Jensen stepped into the shoes of Douglas Henshall as lead detective.

Producer Louise Say gave an insight into the size of the team it takes to make *Shetland* and the complexity of the shoot. "We'd need twice the number of chairs that are here this evening for everyone involved in the show to have a seat, maybe a few more. We have about 65 folk actually on set on location, but, behind the scenes, we have more than double that," she said.

"We have a lot of folk in London on the team as well, but mainly [we] are based in Glasgow.... Travelling to Shetland isn't straightforward, and we have to take the whole team up there – it really is like a foreign shoot."

On the specifics of her role, Say said that being a producer "is a big plate-spinning exercise, really. I am responsible for getting this amazing show on screen. Creatively, that means working with the script team [and being] across the logistics of making sure everyone is in the right place at the right time."

Assistant director Susan Clark went into more detail about the challenges of



BBC

Truly remote filming

RTS Scotland Shooting *Shetland* is far from straightforward. **Bethany Watt** hears how the crime series is created

working in the northernmost part of the UK: "There are all sorts of elements that can change on the day and, especially in Shetland, the weather can just turn on a sixpence.

"Last year, we were on the beach, the director arrived and we just stood there and said, 'We can't shoot.' I mean, you couldn't see. We went to stand everyone down [and] then the sun was out!"

Location manager Tim Maskell discussed being the "first person" on every production. "Initially, my job is to break the shoot down into individual locations and you get a lot of information from the script. And then [there is] striking the locations [and dealing with] the location owners and landowners," he said.

"Also, [liaising with] local councils and police, traffic management, anything you can think of that you would need to do to get everyone to the location is done by me and my team."

Costume designer Lesley Abernethy offered advice on how to break into the industry: "If you've got a degree in costume design, it's good, but it doesn't necessarily mean you're going to fit in with the team in the best way.... In the past, we've had people with that kind of training who haven't worked out.

"When I finished art school, I started working in the theatre, but in those days there weren't as many training schemes and courses. Now you have great courses with ScreenSkills and

the Royal Conservatoire."

Say added: "It's a freelance business. There aren't many full-time jobs.... You would have to be comfortable with that. Have a good rainy-day pot for the leaner times. And, unfortunately, last year there were lean times for a lot of people in our business.

"But actually, at the heart of it, [it's about] being passionate about telling this story with an amazing team. Ultimately, the pay-off is we're all really proud of what we do." ■

'Shetland: Behind the credits' was held on 15 February at BBC Scotland in Glasgow. It was an RTS Scotland event in association with ITV Studios and the BBC for the Bring the Drama Festival.

RTS Technology

The latest ScreenSkills/RTS Scotland online event looked at what it takes to work in a TV hair and make-up department in the company of artists at different stages of their careers.

First up with advice at the late-January session was trainee Miriam Sumeray, who said: “As a trainee, the thing that’s going to set you apart is your soft skills more than your practical skills.” She added that being “personable and organised” were key.

Sumeray recommended using the ScreenSkills Trainee Finder scheme, which had helped her land her first jobs in the industry.

Hair, make-up and prosthetics artist Georgia Hobbs, who has worked on Netflix’s period drama *Bridgerton*, for which hair stylist Marc Pilcher won an Emmy, recalled her first day on set as “terrifying”. She identified “confidence and speed and being able to think on your feet” as key attributes of the job.

Hobbs said her proudest moment in TV has been being thanked by Pilcher in his Emmy acceptance speech: “It was something I will never forget [and] receiving my Emmy certificate for [my]



The Emmy-winning episode of *Bridgerton*

Netflix

Career hair highlights

contribution was pretty crazy.” Her job also throws up some odd challenges. Filming Disney’s *The Little Mermaid*, Hobbs found herself fully clothed, repairing wigs in the Mediterranean.

Experienced make-up designer Jacqui Mallett, who has worked on BBC One hit *The Traitors*, said trainees

needed to “want to learn”. She added: “I find it frustrating when you have a trainee who... sits in the corner and doesn’t say anything.

“I understand it can be daunting... but you have to be interested, enthusiastic and keen.”

Offering a final tip, Hobbs said: “Enjoy it. There are going

to be days when you are cold, wet, tired and a bit grumpy, but you’ll look back on that job... and you won’t remember that – you’ll remember everything that you enjoyed.”

The event was hosted by Liz Tagg, Principal of Iver Make-up Academy at Pinewood Studios.

Matthew Bell

A helping hand from the professionals

RTS Southern

More than 150 students attended Southern Centre’s “Meet the professionals” event in late January, hosted at Bournemouth University. Students from across the Southern region had the chance to network with a range of media professionals to discuss current industry trends and opportunities for

career development. Steph Farmer, executive producer of RedBalloon Productions and a member of the RTS Southern Committee, said: “We try and run this event annually and, as usual, it saw a fantastic turnout, with students from Bournemouth, Solent and Winchester attending.”

Curated and chaired by



Jane Zurakowski

Joshua Du Val

Gordon Cooper, who is also on the RTS Southern Committee, the event saw 14 professionals give their time, from senior execs such as Dom Ho at BlackList and Jane Zurakowski, Head of Production Management at BBC Studios, through to mid- and early-career professionals.

Farmer said: “The information the students receive at events like this is invaluable, and we thank the professionals for their time and energy. It’s a fantastic opportunity for students to see how their own careers might develop and get advice on how to take that first important step.”

Parallels were drawn between TV's ambitions to decarbonise and its far-from-swift attempts to introduce a more diverse and inclusive workforce during a fascinating session, "How clean is TV?", organised by RTS Technology Centre.

Matt Scarff, Managing Director at Albert, the Bafta-owned organisation that works with the industry to help it embed sustainability into its work, said: "There is the power of working together to achieve best practice at speed. When I worked at ITV, it had a very ambitious acceleration plan around diversity and inclusion, which got the whole business focused on it.

"That was not only led by a brilliant CEO, Carolyn McCall, but everyone understood the importance of diversity and inclusion in the broadcast environment. Sustainability is so similar."

Session chair and sustainability consultant Dee Davison said there was good momentum in the industry regarding greener ways of doing things but, she asked, "Are



we moving fast enough?"

"Are we prepared for the effects of climate change over the coming years, including the availability of resources in our supply chains?"

Davison said that "together at speed" could be a slogan for what needs to be done: "We have to move faster; we have to do this together."



An outside broadcast truck going green

EMG

Together at speed

Technology Centre

An RTS panel urged the TV industry to act faster on sustainable working. **Steve Clarke reports**

Rohan Mitchell, Group ESG Director at sport production specialists EMG, said: "We've made a great start but everyone in the screen industry needs to look at how they can be more efficient and more sustainable."

People were still travelling in separate cars to productions, but some improvements were visible.

enough. We need to educate people.... Going forward, how do we embed sustainability within our core business decisions?"

Alison Butler, Sustainability Supply Manager at the BBC, said it was important to encourage suppliers to look at their total emissions and things they can control, such as the electricity they buy.

She added: "The majority of our emissions are in the supply chain.... They have to ask themselves what things they can put in place to decarbonise and reduce the emissions at their organisation?"

Mitchell outlined how sport production had moved into remote production over the past four or five years, led by such UK broadcasters as Sky and TNT.

He calculated that by not travelling to events, emissions were reduced by about 40%. "It takes some of the glamour out of it. I worked in Formula 1 for many years. Now I'm making amends for all the air miles I've clocked up."

Mitchell told the RTS that, in the past four years, the EMG Group had worked on around 5,000 remote productions.

"Even if we're only saving a few kilos of CO₂ per event, it's still an impact."

He continued: "You can leverage technology, which is what we're doing, whether it's a remote production, a Cloud production, or a simplified production. The technology is there now so we don't have to have everyone going to site."

Smaller, more efficient trucks were introduced into EMG's OB fleet last year.

Was there an appetite for trying to do things in a new way? "Yes. It's also opened out the lower-tier sports, such as streaming women's netball or non-live rugby league or union. We can cover sports using less equipment and less energy. You have to be agile in this space.

"Many clients have gone down that road but there's some that still like the traditional path. We still do some big on-site jobs where everyone goes on site." ■

'How clean is TV?' was an RTS Technology Centre event held on 6 February. The producer was Stephen Stewart. It can be watched at: www.bit.ly/RTS-clean

RTS Bursaries TV presenter AJ Odudu is the new ambassador for the RTS bursary schemes, which are now accepting applications for 2024. The *Big Brother* host will meet and mentor scholars and attend bursaries events.

She said: “As someone who worked their way up and started my career with no connections in the TV industry, coming from a working-class background in Blackburn to finding my feet in the industry, I know how important being supported by such a prestigious institution will be for the recipients.”

“I look forward to meeting the talented students and hearing all about their aspirations for the future.”

Over 10 years, bursary schemes have supported 350 students, of whom 82% have gone on to forge careers in TV and the media. Bursaries are awarded to talented students from lower-income backgrounds, studying for



AJ Odudu

Satellite414

Odudu is new ambassador

an undergraduate degree or HND level 5 or 6.

Grace Hynds, a 2023 bursary recipient, said: “My first year as an RTS Bursary

Scholar gave me a plethora of opportunities to network and meet like-minded individuals.... The bursary also supported me greatly financially – I

was able to contribute funding towards my university short film, television programme and editing software for my coursework.”

Applications will be accepted for three bursary schemes – the TV Production and Journalism (TVPJ) Bursary, the Digital Innovation Bursary and the Steve Hewlett Scholarship – until Monday 24 June. For eligibility information and details of how to apply, go to: rts.org.uk/education-and-training/pages/bursaries.

As part of the TVPJ scheme, a successful bursary recipient with an interest in producing will receive the Beryl Vertue Scholarship, which was introduced in 2022.

Donations from STV, Apple TV+, All3Media, the Steve Hewlett Fund, Hartswood Films and ITV Daytime, as well as in-kind support from other companies and individuals, have enabled the bursary schemes to flourish.

Matthew Bell



The rising cost of being well informed

A memorable if occasionally sombre night at the RTS Television Journalism Awards, with the devastating attack on Israel followed by the war in Gaza uppermost in many attendees’ minds.

Estimates for the number of journalists killed in the conflict vary. Awards Chair Adrian Wells said the latest figure is 94, an unprecedented number for a war not yet six months old. The vast majority of those killed were local news gatherers.

A minute’s silence was observed for these brave professionals and all journalists killed in war zones in the

past year. This was a moving and subdued opening to the ceremony.

“I hope the mood will lift from here,” said Wells, chairing the awards ceremony for the first time. With the effervescent *Good Morning Britain* presenter Susanna Reid hosting proceedings, the atmosphere in the room soon picked up.

Second time lucky for awards host Reid

ITV, Sky News, Channel 4 and ITN all had much to celebrate, as did the evening’s host, who defeated strong competition from Channel 4’s Matt Frei and the BBC’s Laura Kuenssberg to finally win Network Presenter of the Year.

Close to tears, the erstwhile *Strictly* runner-up – shortlisted for Network Presenter of the Year in 2023 and 2024 – paid tribute to the late Bill Turnbull

for teaching her so much about the art of live TV.

She recalled how *The Sun* once predicted that *Good Morning Britain* would be cancelled within months of its launch. Nearly a decade later, the show is arguably stronger than ever, regularly helping to set the news agenda.

Female journalists reap recognition

It was a night in which female broadcasters were noticeably to the fore. *Newsnight* anchor Kirsty Wark, greeted by a standing ovation, won the Outstanding Contribution Award. Extraordinary to think that Kirsty has seen off eight prime ministers and 10 *Newsnight* editors!

CNN Worldwide’s Christiane Amanpour triumphed in the Network Interview of the Year category for her interview with imprisoned

Iranian-American businessman Siamak Namazi.

Accepting the Political Journalist of the Year award, Sky News’s Beth Rigby appealed for lots of live debate and long-form interviews in the looming general election.

Lewis calls for more consumer coverage

The most passionate acceptance speech was given by the campaigning presenter Martin Lewis, who won the RTS Special Award for *The Martin Lewis Money Show* and being the people’s champion on *Good Morning Britain*.

As the cost of living crisis continues, the doyen of consumer journalism called for more investment in the genre and berated the BBC for winding down *Watchdog*. “I’d love some bloody competition,” he complained.

The Upside agrees. ■



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