

November 2023

Television



Archie:
The torment
behind the
facade



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From the CEO



I was thrilled to host an RTS Patron Dinner earlier this month at which the Society awarded seven new Fellowships to some of the outstanding TV talent we are blessed with in the UK. Congratulations to all the new Fellows. You'll find details on our news pages.

Among this starry line-up were three writers, including the brilliant creator of *The Split*, Abi Morgan. Don't miss Abi's TV Diary. It was great to see about 100 RTS Bursary Scholars mixing with our sector's great and good at the dinner.

Our centres have been busy these past weeks hosting some outstanding

events. RTS Yorkshire held its Annual Awards in grand style, while RTS Midlands celebrated the 25th anniversary of the landmark comedy *Goodness Gracious Me*, where some of the show's creatives recalled how the series was put together.

This month's cover story is ITV's eagerly awaited biopic, *Archie*, which examines the truth behind one of Hollywood's defining legends, Cary Grant, with Jason Isaacs playing the tortured star.

RTS West of England hosted a screening and Q&A in Bristol, Grant's birthplace, with the series's creator, Jeff Pope, producer Rebecca Hodgson and actor Laura Aikman, who plays Grant's fourth wife, Dyan Cannon.

Elsewhere in November's *Television*, Shilpa Ganatra speaks to the makers of the new BBC Three coming-of-age drama *Grime Kids*, which emphasises the joy of grime music.

Also striking an urban note is Harrison Bennett's analysis of why George the Poet's podcast is an essential listen. All this and Simon Shaps's review of Michael Wolff's latest book on Rupert Murdoch.

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at next month's RTS Craft & Design Awards 2023.

Theresa Wise

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RTS Midlands celebrates the groundbreaking *Goodness Gracious Me*, which subverted racial stereotypes but is still alarmingly relevant

OUR FRIEND IN DUBLIN

Things have been very quiet here in Dublin, lately, what with the screenwriters' strike and the SAG strike bringing film and TV activity almost to a halt. However, the strikes are now over and a brighter future is on the horizon.

Evidence for this is the great news that *Wednesday*, Netflix's most-watched English-language show ever, is relocating from London to Dublin for its next season. Filming is due to start at the end of April at locations in Dublin and Wicklow.

Smaller scale, bread-and-butter work has been ticking away in the background. Something a bit bigger is *Moonflower Murders*, the sequel to the very successful BBC and PBS series *Magpie Murders*, which has just finished filming in Dublin.

This adaptation of the Anthony Horowitz novel, the second in the Susan Ryeland series, is a six-parter and stars Lesley Manville and Timothy McMullan, both of whom featured in *Magpie Murders*. It is a BBC co-production with Masterpiece Theatre for PBS.

On the TV front, the biggest news-maker recently has been the Society's own Republic of Ireland Centre, which presented the inaugural Gay Byrne Memorial Lecture on 2 November at the Light House Cinema complex in Smithfield, Dublin. A neighbourhood, incidentally, that has been named "the second coolest neighbourhood on the planet" by *Time Out*.

Byrne, who died four years ago, was Ireland's most famous and loved broadcaster. He broke the mould in so many ways, wading fearlessly into the morass of national taboos and



Agnes Cogan

Agnes Cogan is pleased that local production is gearing up following the end of the disputes in Hollywood

shibboleths that have so deeply affected Irish society. One commentator described him as "the great window-opener": he let in fresh air and light to illuminate many dark corners that some would have preferred left hidden.

In his memory, the Republic of

**‘[DEBATE AT THE
RTS EVENT] SHED
SOME LIGHT
AND QUITE A
BIT OF HEAT ON
THE QUESTION
POSED BY THE
LECTURE’**

Ireland Centre instituted an annual lecture dealing with contemporary concerns and issues in broadcasting and society. The title of the first lecture was "Public service broadcasting: what is it, what is it for, and what is its future?" (see report on page 31).

The keynote speaker was Moya Doherty, one of Ireland's most successful and experienced TV producers. She created the TV phenomenon that is *Riverdance* and chaired the RTÉ Board for eight years. The moderator was Pat Kenny, Gay's successor as host of *The Late Late show*, the world's longest-running chat show, who hosted the programme until 2009. He now presents his own daily show for radio station Newstalk.

The context to this much anticipated lecture is the veritable earthquake inside our national broadcaster, RTÉ. Allegations about its governance and financial affairs have rocked Ireland's broadcasting landscape.

Some of the scandal's origins could be traced back to the time when Doherty was Chair of RTÉ, although she was emphatic that she knew nothing of what was afoot. This led to a lively exchange of views, shedding some light and quite a bit of heat on the question posed by the night's lecture.

Recommendations have been made for a root and branch reform of Irish broadcasting. Plans for where RTÉ goes next are expected to be announced shortly.

Things may have been quiet on the TV and film production front, but some very serious questions have been raised regarding the future of broadcasting in this country. ■

Agnes Cogan is Chair of RTS Republic of Ireland.

TV diary

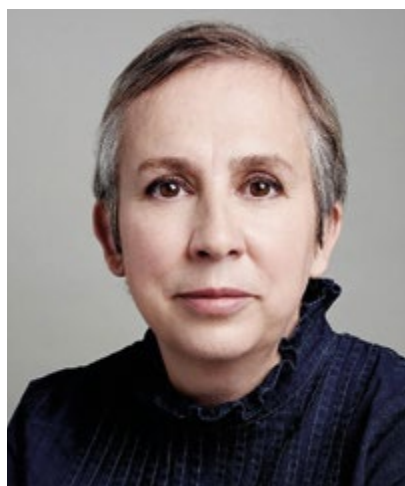
The SAG actors were still on strike as the awards season kicked in, throwing up a dilemma for the promoters of TV and film and press junket organisers. Those behind the camera were invited in. Screenwriters, costume designers, composers, make-up artists and production designers were rolled out for the film Q&As, and it proved exhilarating. It is a reminder that it takes a village to raise a great movie.

■ **If nothing else, the strike exposed the brilliance of those who work behind the camera. Inevitably, years of edits and grades mean I can spend more time marvelling at the visual effects of backgrounds than watching the actual film.**

Listening to Martin Scorsese or Emerald Fennell and their respective creative teams unpick the DNA of every shot, costume, sound and casting choice is riveting. I miss the actors at the BFI London Film Festival, but the understudies may have stolen the show.

■ It was Prince Philip who said: “The man who invented the red carpet needs his head examined.” It is the most excruciating element of promoting a film and I avoid it like the plague.

But it's cold and it's October, and I am invited to be on the jury for best debut film at the 18th Rome Film Festival. The chance to spend 12 days feasting on movies and drinking in art and architecture while gorging on bowls of buttery pasta and gelato found on the corner of every cobbled street seems too irresistible to decline.



In a troubled world, Abi Morgan hopes that we can all learn from the power of storytelling

■ **For once, I pack appropriately, safe in the knowledge that the cameras will be on the actors and directors, while I, as writers so often do, will shuffle quickly past into the safe retreat of a cinema to bathe myself in European film-making.**

While the rest of the world burns, Rome fiddles. The Middle East is exploding, and Ukraine has been at war for more than 600 days.

I debated whether to go. In the end, cinema won. I put my trust in the power of its ability to provoke, nourish and offer sanctuary, and the hope that we learn through story. I'm in good company.

■ **The opening ceremony: actors [those not in SAG], directors and producers gather from the US, Japan, Iran, France, UK, Sweden, Italy and beyond to screen their films and mingle with their fellow artists.**

I drink warm prosecco and chat with Mahalia Belo, here with the beautiful *The End We Start From* starring Jodie Comer in another blistering performance.

I am reminded of the first premiere I attended of a film that I had written. There is a photograph floating about somewhere of me, standing, buckling under the weight of several coats and bags as the entire cast, director and producer face a wall of flashing cameras. I am looking on like a coat-check attendant wondering if they will remember to tip.

■ **On decision day, we spar and debate. Films are loved and hated. Performances are revered. What feels new and exciting for someone is familiar and unsurprising for another. Not all the best films win.**

There are gems that are overlooked, important voices that won't be commended this year. But there is ambition, and talent and urgency to the storytelling. I am left both satiated and hungry for the big ideas. Highlights are *Cottontail*, by Patrick Dickinson, and Mehdi Fikri's *After the Fire*. Check them out.

■ **Back in London, I attend the RTS Patron Dinner to pick up a gong. I am given 90 seconds to offer top tips to a roomful of RTS bursary students. I stumble through and am humbled by Jesse Armstrong, who gives a shout out to his “brother and sister” in arms. Jack Thorne is also being awarded a Fellowship.**

So proud to be in the company of these brilliant writers and a reminder of sending the lift back down.

Abi Morgan is a playwright and screenwriter.

COMFORT CLASSIC

Steve Clarke praises a groundbreaking sitcom with no one-liners and no laughter track

In the past quarter of a century, few UK sitcoms have been as influential as *The Royle Family*, the startlingly original and unusually naturalistic comedy that, over three series from 1998 to 2000, mined the mundanity of northern working-class life for BBC Two.

The Royle Family, made by Granada Television, was the precursor of *The Office*, *Gavin & Stacey*, *This Country* and, yes, *Gogglebox*.

Downbeat and often poignant, the genesis of this very British show was the late-1990s Manchester alternative comedy scene and the desire of one of its stars, co-creator Caroline Aherne, to make a TV show that didn't involve performing before an audience.

As its executive producer, Andy Harries, then Granada's Head of Comedy, recently told *The Guardian*: "After two series of *The Mrs Merton Show*... she was desperate to develop something that didn't have an audience. The compromise we struck was a blind script deal to allow Caroline, Craig [Cash] and Henry [Normal] to work on a project with no interference."

Aherne's ambition for the show was simple – to write a sitcom revolving around an ordinary family set in real time. This sounded straightforward but, despite enlisting some serious acting talent in the shape of Sue Johnston and Ricky Tomlinson from Channel 4's taboo-busting soap, *Brookside*, the show's pilot was a disaster.

The problem was that it had been shot like a traditional sitcom, featuring a laughter track, bright furniture and multi-cam video. A new, more restrained set was built, and a handheld camera was used to give the show its documentary feel. The laughter track was binned, something that worried the suits at the BBC.

The Royle Family's blue-collar antecedents were in 1950s kitchen sink drama and the Ray Galton and Alan



BBC

Simpson classic, *Steptoe and Son*. Are there echoes of Pinter and Beckett here, too?

Aherne, Cash and Normal brought real affection and tenderness to their scripts and were brave enough to keep the pace glacially slow.

Those who wanted quickfire gags or high production values could go elsewhere. This was Slow TV before the term was invented, as the action – if action is the word – unfolded gently as the family were glued to the box as they sat in their living room. In *The Royle Family* less really was more. This was the television equivalent of JJ Cale, the laid-back composer of *After Midnight*.

What kept all this domestic mundanity from being boring was the clever characterisation and consummate acting. Tomlinson was utterly compelling as Jim Royle, a shiftless, nose-picking slob. Jim revelled in his indolence. He couldn't even be bothered to do up his flies.

On one memorable occasion, Jim is seen pointing at his mother-in-law's catheter bag. "I'd love one of them bags," he says. "You'd hardly miss any telly." He loves teasing his family and his putdowns are often punctuated by an immaculately timed: "My arse."

While Jim is an idler, his wife Babs (Johnson) is the family's sweet-natured matriarch. She won't hear a bad word said about any of her relations, especially her grownup daughter, Denise (Aherne), who has inherited several of her dad's character traits. Babs dotes on Denise. Both are chain smokers.

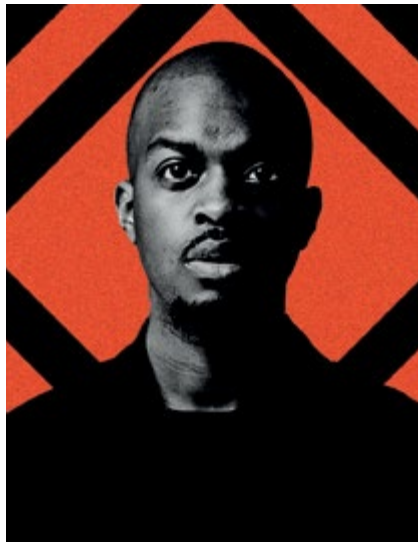
Cash is priceless as Dave, Denise's gormless, doleful boyfriend and, later, husband. When Denise and Dave produce their first child, Denise is a hopeless mother.

One of the recurring jokes is the Royles' total disregard for nutritious food as Dairylea on toast and Turkey Twizzlers are consumed.

If you're looking for an antidote to aspirational comedy, seek out *The Royle Family*. A good place to start is *The Queen of Sheba*, one of several Christmas specials. I guarantee it will make you laugh and cry. Not for nothing did the programme win two RTS awards in 2007, the Writer: Comedy and Situation Comedy prizes. Tragically, Aherne died in 2016, bringing down the curtain on one of our greatest and most cherished television comedies. ■

The Royle Family is on BritBox, BBC iPlayer and Gold.

Ear candy



BBC

Have You Heard George's Podcast?

It is far too modest a title. By now, most of us have heard of George Mpanga's podcast. The British spoken-word artist, known to millions as George the Poet, has piled up the accolades for his lyrical explorations of inner-city life.

From rap music to racist policing to the Grenfell disaster, on *Have You Heard George's Podcast?*, he weaves vivid stories with a stirring blend of pensive rhyming verse, elaborate sound design, rich compositions from his close collaborator Benbrick (aka Paul Carter) and enough banging tunes to warrant a Spotify playlist.

George's multicultural background has always been the thread that ties the compellingly digressive podcast together. His parents emigrated from Uganda in the 1980s and raised him on a north-west London housing estate.

For this new series, however, he turns his gaze fully towards Africa and the Caribbean, rescuing the glories and tragedies of their pasts from our collective, colonial amnesia.

The history lesson of the first episode makes for a more linear narrative, but one that is no less alive than usual. George first needle drops us into Ghana with *Second Sermon* by the native singer Black Sheriff, a rousing Afro-fusion/UK drill anthem in which he hears the same struggle black people face everywhere: to make their success match their grief.

On 6 March 1957, Ghana became the second African colony after Egypt to win independence from Britain.

But independence came only after an arduous fight, led by Kwame Nkrumah, and it is Nkrumah and his long journey to freedom that George lovingly brings to life.

There is also a bite to his pen. There's a moment early on when he plays the painfully patronising words spoken by a British representative in the loftiest Queen's English – "Ghana has chosen the path of democracy and has accepted the political values that we in this country hold dear" – before he poetically lays them to waste. "They said they were proud of their former colony, like they helped them build a mature economy, like they brought the region more than war and poverty, like they never shipped Africans off the shore as property."

While tapes of Mpanga's friends echo Nkrumah's sentiments in the modern day – reminders of how far we are yet to progress – Benbrick's arrangements are bolstered by the BBC Concert Orchestra. Not for the first time, they lend a cinematic sweep to the series.

Come the end, as hard-won strings soundtrack Nkrumah's victory in Ghana's first democratic election, it may be the first time George's podcast moves you, but it won't be the last. ■

Harrison Bennett

WORKING LIVES: DIRECTOR



BBC *The Sixth Commandment*

Saul Dibb helmed the acclaimed drama, BBC One's harrowing true-crime serial *The Sixth Commandment*. The director moves between cinema, for which he has made the highly influential *Bullet Boy* and *The Duchess*, and TV shows, including *The Salisbury Poisonings*.

What does the job involve?

I guess the simple answer is that the clue is in the title: it's about having a clear direction in which you want to take a project.

You're the hand on the tiller, making sure all the departments and actors are going in the same direction.

I started in documentaries, so I'm trying to make things feel real and truthful. I'm not just trying to deliver the script, which is what a lot of people think a director's job is. You have to breathe life into it so it doesn't feel written, or even directed.

In some ways, I see my job as trying

to subtly erase my own presence. I want people to be looking at [the actors] rather than me.

It sounds like a huge job?

It's absolutely exhausting because there is no downtime. It can take pretty much a year to make a film or TV series.

Given that they take so long to make, are you picky about the films and series you take on?

You have to choose carefully. I've always wanted control over my projects and to make them in the way I wanted, whether they worked or not. To begin with, lots didn't and I look back and say to myself: "My God, what was I thinking?"

What was your route into directing?

In my late teens, I got into photography. My dad made arts documentaries for the BBC, so we always had a Super 8 camera at home. I went to the

University of East Anglia and did a theoretical film course; it was brilliant because I saw loads of films, but frustrating because I didn't get to make them. I started making short films, but got diverted into making documentaries, which I loved and did for 10 years.

What was the first programme you directed?

New York to California, in 1995, a road trip from the village of New York in Lincolnshire to California on the north coast of Norfolk. I pitched it to Channel 4 and they put me together with the writer Jon Ronson and we went on this two-week, low-budget odyssey looking for the US in England.

I had a great champion in [producer] Peter Grimsdale – people who put their faith in you make a massive difference to your career. Afterwards, he commissioned Jon and me to make *Tottenham Ayatollah*, which was my first big success in documentaries.

Why did you turn to drama?

I wanted to explore the use of guns by young people in Britain, so I went to the BBC where David Thompson and Ruth Caleb were running a brilliant scheme with the Film Council to give documentary film-makers a chance to make low-budget feature films.

I pitched *Bullet Boy*, a bit flippantly,



as “Kees with guns” as I wanted them to understand the sensibility of it – it wasn’t going to be sensational. I sent the script to Ashley Walters [he subsequently starred in the film], who was serving time in a young offender institution for carrying a gun. It came at the right time for him and me.

Film or television?

I don’t have a preference and I’m so glad that the snobbery that used to exist about working in TV has gone. It was just nonsense. Brilliant things exist in each form.

In TV, if you come on board as a director, there is a certainty that it will get made.

For a film, because they cost so much money and have to be sold around the world, often on the back of a famous actor, it’s much more precarious. I spent a year preparing a film that was four weeks away from production and then folded – and that’s not uncommon.

What do you bring to work with you?

Very little – a watch, because time is your enemy, and an iPad mini, which contains notes on the script, and mood boards.

What are the best and worst parts of the job?

Shooting an amazing scene: getting your actors together with a great script, such as Sarah Phelps’s script for *The Sixth Commandment*, and feeling that you’ve really got something special.

Then, once you’ve edited it, showing it to everyone involved and seeing

them moved by it, that’s an extraordinary feeling.

The worst is when you’re unlucky enough to work with difficult people.

What attracted you to *The Sixth Commandment*?

I knew the story, but I was blown away by the power of the script. The story of this lonely, closeted gay man in his sixties (played by Timothy Spall) who feels like he’s falling in love for the first time – I would have made that on its own – it was heartbreakingly told.

Its reception was extraordinary; it wasn’t just the fantastic reviews, it also connected with people from all walks of life across the country.

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

On set, I work really hard to create a sense of calm, which doesn’t mean I’m feeling calm myself. Everyone’s

looking to the director – if the director is panicking, so will everyone else. No one does their best work under stress.

Has it ever got too stressful on set?

I made *Suite Française* with Harvey Weinstein as the producer, which was the most awful film-making experience of my life – he was a relentless bully. That was incredibly stressful.

After that, things don’t get to me in the same way – nothing will be as bad as that.

Which directors have inspired you?

The late, great Jean-Marc Vallée (*Dallas Buyers Club* and *Wild*) was a brilliant director. His films look amazing, but they also have a real sense of spontaneity and truthfulness.

What makes a good director?

The good ones are very clear about what they want to make and how they’re going to make it. They also need the ability to articulate their vision to everyone they’re working with and to bring them around so they share it. The good director also listens.

What advice would you give to someone wanting to direct?

Watch lots and lots of films and television – you can learn so much from seeing how others have told stories. You have to make things, as many short films as you can. And you need perseverance: you’ve got to be in it for the long haul.

Has the job changed over time?

The job hasn’t changed but, thankfully, film and TV set environments have. When I first started, I often didn’t like the atmosphere on set: the culture of it felt alien to me – they were monocultural and male. That’s not representative of the world we live in.

There have been big changes in the make-up of drama sets; they’re more inclusive and I see less bad behaviour. They’re still stressful environments, but they’re nicer places.

Are there genres you’d love to take on?

It’s never about the genre: it’s whether a project has a real emotional power that I feel I can bring something to. ■

Saul Dibb was interviewed by Matthew Bell. He is represented by Casarotto Ramsay.

‘IF THE DIRECTOR IS PANICKING, SO WILL EVERYONE ELSE’

Cary Grant was the ultimate Hollywood star, the suavest man on the silver screen during cinema's golden age.

Whatever the role – from the unscrupulous newspaper editor of *His Girl Friday* to ordinary-man-on-the-run in *North by Northwest* – he was always Grant: charming, urbane, the epitome of cool.

Surely, then, only the vainest of actors would sign up to play him in *Archie*, ITV's new four-part drama about Grant, written by Jeff Pope?

Jason Isaacs' initial reaction when approached was dismissive. "Who's the idiot who's written this? Why would anyone try to put Cary Grant on the screen? You'd have to be a moron to take the job," he says.

"But I'd seen Jeff Pope's work and he's not an idiot... so I read [his script] and [realised] Cary Grant didn't exist; [he] was someone that a man invented because he was so tortured and he needed – not that he was aware of this necessarily – the love of as many people as he could get, possibly the whole world, to fill a hole inside him. And it didn't.

"The first time, maybe, that he felt he belonged... was when he had a daughter, and I recognised that in myself. I thought: 'I can play a really messed-up man who can fake many things in many situations to many people. I can't play Cary Grant, but I can have a crack at playing Archie Leach.'"

Archibald Alec Leach was born into grinding poverty in 1904. His Bristol childhood was unimaginably awful: following the death of his elder brother, his grieving mother was callously committed to an asylum by his father, who then abandoned him.

As a teenager, Archie sailed to New York as a stilt walker in a vaudeville troupe. He stayed, adopting the stage name Cary Grant and that inimitable, strangled mid-Atlantic accent.

At an airport, Pope had picked up a copy of *Good Stuff: A Reminiscence of My Father, Cary Grant*, by his daughter, Jennifer, and was intrigued. An initial meeting with her mother and Cary's ex-wife, the actor Dyan Cannon, followed shortly after Pope had finished *Philomena*, the multi-award-winning film written with Steve Coogan.

"When I first talked to Dyan, it was going to be a movie," says Pope. "In the end, it was a blessing that I didn't try to boil it down into 90 minutes.... We

The man who didn't exist



ITV's new Cary Grant biopic, *Archie*, explores the truth behind the legend. **Matthew Bell** reports

wouldn't have got anywhere near to the essence of the guy."

Archie bubbled along for years as a project before Pope finally started to write it shortly before the pandemic.

By then, the writer – normally associated with factual crime dramas such as *Little Boy Blue* and *Suspect: The*

Shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes, now filming – had made another foray into Hollywood, writing the screenplay for *Stan & Ollie*, an affectionate film depicting Laurel and Hardy's twilight years.

Scripting *Archie* required great sensitivity. "I had to tell the story that I wanted to tell, but it was difficult for

Jennifer to have her dad's dirty laundry hung out in front of everyone," says Pope. "Diane would talk about his controlling behaviour and some of the darker stuff, such as encouraging her to use LSD. That was tough for Jennifer.

"Ultimately, she gave her blessing because there is context – Cary is not some kind of psychopath behaving in an odd, controlling, disturbing way for no reason. It hasn't come out of nowhere.

"Right from the beginning, the ground rules were that it had to be my take. But that didn't mean we didn't argue – we did. We did get there and they're happy with the finished product and I am, too. I don't think it pulls punches."

As Pope says, *Archie* doesn't flinch from portraying Grant's dark side, but it is also a homage to the glitz and glamour of Hollywood. Pitch-perfect portrayals of Grace Kelly, Doris Day, Alfred Hitchcock and others pepper the drama. Director Paul Andrew Williams even restaged a famous scene from Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*, Pope's favourite Grant film.

The screenwriter admits to embarrassment about the latter: "I hadn't twigged that [the scene in which] Cary dived down to escape the crop duster was shot in the studio. I thought we were going to be out in a big cornfield."

Isaacs read a mound of biographies in researching the role, and the court papers from Grant's various divorces. What he couldn't find was footage of the actor off-screen to hear and thus mimic his accent when he wasn't acting. "Good luck finding interviews with him; he didn't want to be seen; he didn't want to be known," says Isaacs, who played Lucius Malfoy in the Harry Potter films.

Eventually, Isaacs came across an interview recorded by a student towards the end of Grant's life, taped against the actor's wishes. "He hadn't played it to anyone in nearly 40 years out of respect and a sense of responsibility. After much begging, he played it to me and I heard many of [Grant's] insecurities and felt I'd finally made a real connection.

"That's the voice you hear [in *Archie*]; it's more English than he is in the movies. [People] think they remember Cary's voice, but what they really remember is Tony Curtis in *Some Like It Hot*. That's not who he was."

Dyan is played by Laura Aikman, who recently appeared in the British film *Scrapper*. To research the role, she watched Cannon's appearances on



Laura Aikman as Dyan Cannon and Jason Isaacs as Cary Grant

ITV

The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson.

"I got obsessed with these interviews of her on *Carson* and I fell head over heels for Dyan. She's so funny and charming and sexy," she says.

Aikman is great, holding her own with Isaacs, whose performance is extraordinary. She nails Cannon's decency and charm, assisted by an uncanny resemblance to her: "You get these auditions and you think: 'I'm not going to get that.' And then I started looking at pictures of Dyan and thought I might have a look in, actually."

Briefly, Grant finds happiness with Cannon. "For all that he had a massive footprint all over the world, it's a very personal, domestic story of Cary and Dyan's time [together]," says Isaacs.

The torment, though, is never far away, says Pope: "Grant was the most urbane, suave movie star in the world, but he was also a dark, troubled man." ■

***Archie*, produced by Etta Pictures, Jeff Pope's ITV Studios label, airs on ITV from 23 November.**

Hollywood royalty in the shadows

Dyan Cannon, Cary Grant's fourth wife, and their daughter, Jennifer Grant, offered Jeff Pope a window into Grant's private life. Cannon married Grant, 33 years her senior, in 1965. Jennifer was two when her parents divorced but remained close to her father for his last two decades.

The two women have enjoyed long acting careers, with Cannon earning three Oscar nominations and winning a Golden Globe for *Heaven Can Wait*. Both have executive producer credits on *Archie*.

Seeing a version of herself on screen feels 'weird', says Cannon. She praises Laura Aikman for doing 'such a wonderful job; I'm so proud of her. She

really captured my heart [and] that's not an easy thing to do.'

Discussing Jason Isaacs' portrayal of her husband, she applauds 'the depth' he gave Grant. 'He's not an easy man to portray, he was so complicated, and yet so simple and easy when he was doing his swag.'

Jennifer says: 'He spoke so little about his life, his boyhood; sadly, I think there was so much shame wrapped up in it. We all know the winsome, charming, amazing Cary Grant, which was a large part of him every day. But [the series] focuses on... his Achilles heel.

'It's that achy part of dad... So it saddens me but it's brilliant.'



A live deepfake performance on America's Got Talent seemingly by judge Simon Cowell

AI: TV's next frontier

Daily, we are bombarded by headlines announcing the wonders – and risks – that generative artificial intelligence is bringing to our lives. AI has been used to help identify the hostages taken by Hamas from southern Israel on 7 October. More mundanely, apparently it can also help stem the alarming rise in shoplifting. On the other hand, it could put many of us out of work, lead to rampant breaches of copyright and, ultimately, make it nigh on impossible to tell what on our screens is fake and what is real.

Last month, a stimulating and ambitious RTS session, “Lights, camera, AI: The art of the possible from script to screen”, wrestled with how AI is affecting the production of TV and film.

Ironically, given the hi-tech nature of much of the discussion, the event was curiously prone to glitches, with miscued videos and an unexplained bang as the panellists settled down for the evening's sometimes mind-stretching discussion.

The RTS learns how artificial intelligence is reframing the world of content creation and production – and why it doesn't do comedy

At one point, attendees were told about something called “procedural content generation”, in which AI creates “infinite podcasts and infinite movies” that will react to us as individuals as we listen to or watch them. Apparently, it gauges our reactions to assess whether or not we're enjoying a show and changes it if we appear not to be! And it's not every RTS event that includes a rap about it created by ChatGPT.

Host Lara Lewington, tech presenter, journalist and AI commentator, began by making the point that even “the godfathers of AI can't agree on anything, not even a definition of AI”.

So how would panel member

Danijela Horak, Head of Applied Research, AI at BBC R&D, define it? “In the old days of machine learning, we had to train the model for a specific task and train many models to execute specific tasks. Today, with the likes of ChatGPT, we no longer need to do that: you send a single query to ChatGPT and get the answer immediately.”

Matthew Griffin, futurist, author and CEO of the 311 Institute, said he had been talking about generative artificial intelligence for about eight years. He believed we were roughly where he expected we would be in terms of the development of the technology and the rate of investment. “From now until 2035, the technology will accelerate quicker than before,” he predicted. “We've got technology that can do amazing stuff, but people may not want to use it. It may not be cheap enough or easy enough to use.”

Victoria Weller, Chief of Staff at ElevenLabs, which specialises in AI-generated voiceovers, said her company's objective was to make content universally accessible in any voice and in any language and so

transcend language barriers. “We can go from written text to natural-sounding human audio virtually in real time,” she said. ElevenLabs can also generate voices that never existed before.

But was instant voice cloning safe, asked Lewington, suggesting that one of its uses could be to make it even easier to create deepfakes, such as a recent one of Labour leader Keir Starmer verbally abusing his staff, published on the eve of the party conference.

As the debate opened out, the RTS

operator or a director. The idea, Lewington said, was not to abolish these positions and make people redundant, but to provide broadcasters and streamers with opportunities to show “things that might otherwise not be filmed or have a commentary”. She noted that the BBC conducted experiments along these lines at this summer’s Wimbledon, but “found them quite glitchy”.

Griffin pointed out that the pioneering AI company Metaphysic had, for some time, been creating “hyperreal

companies should be doing, they’re experimenting.”

He added: “In the conversations I have with Disney, the company says, ‘Ultimately, we want an artificial intelligence where you push a magic red button and it spits out a blockbuster Marvel movie.’ We then get into how AI knows what a good movie is. When we talk about AI being able to create good content, it looks at the ratings and the reviews.”

Rather alarmingly, Griffin suggested that, in the future, books would all be written by AI. “Now that artificial intelligence has mastered human language, it’s able to write books, blogs, journalism, scripts,” he said. “Ultimately, AI is going to start eating into libraries. ‘This is the human section over there,’” he quipped.

Lewington forecast that books authored by people, rather than machines, would carry a premium.

On the vexed question of distinguishing between real images and those created by AI, and audiences’ ability to tell the difference, the jury appears to be out on how to achieve this. “We haven’t found the answer yet,” said Weller. “One thing we’ve found for AI audio content is that, when people are confronted with a piece of content, they need to have a way to figure out: ‘Is this real or is it AI-generated?’”

Here, it seems, the machines may have the upper hand. Griffin said: “We can apply watermarks, but they can be stripped off quite easily. Generative AI can be used to strip the watermark off sound and image content.”

We may not be far off the day when AI is creating the next Disney animated blockbuster, but it seems that anyone hoping to be the next Victoria Wood or Sharon Horgan can relax – generative AI doesn’t do humour.

“About a year ago we found that AI was rubbish at comedy,” said Griffin. “How do we get AI to be funny? It depends on the commands it is given. If you tell it to write jokes in the style of a famous comedian, you get a better result. By changing the prompt, you can affect ChatGPT’s style. If you wanted AI to create a comedy podcast, it would be bad – it doesn’t get comedy.” ■

Report by Steve Clarke. ‘Lights, camera, AI: The art of the possible from script to screen’ was an RTS national event held at London’s Cavendish Conference Centre on 9 October. The producers were Phil Barnes and Kim Chua.



From left: Danijela Horak, Matthew Griffin, Lara Lewington and Victoria Weller

Paul Hampartsoumian

was shown examples of the BBC using AI for more innocuous purposes. These included a vintage black-and-white clip of a youthful David Attenborough, the second Controller of BBC Two, extolling the virtues of colour TV. Horak said AI could be used to help restore and digitise archive content, principally videos and photographs. It was also being deployed to convert text to speech and introduce more regional accents to the BBC’s output.

It could also make media production workflows more efficient. This was demonstrated with a clip from *Autumnwatch*. Previously, a producer had to go through countless hours of footage to identify a specific bird species, but machine learning could do the same task far faster.

AI also offers some intriguing possibilities for sports producers. Weller shared footage of motor racing as the race commentary was successively dubbed by AI from the original English into Hindi, Polish, German and French, all in almost real time.

There is now the potential to direct sports events without a camera

content”, famously crafting a Tom Cruise deepfake during the pandemic and a Simon Cowell avatar for *America’s Got Talent*.

He added: “Producers can now take a foreign-language movie they have made and automatically dub it into English.” As for creating avatars, he said: “Most technology developments are linear. We fixed wonky mouth syndrome, then the eyes and shoulders [which need to relate to hand gestures]. We’ve now got hand actions because the AI understands the context.”

Hollywood had reached a point where the studios were trying to automate different parts of pre- and post-production, from scriptwriting to colourisation. This had led to the writers’ strike, which has been resolved for now, but such disruptive pressures on working practices can only increase.

The producers of the gloriously irreverent *South Park* have, not surprisingly, said Griffin, “been messing about with deepfakes for the past four years. On YouTube they’ve created a deepfake channel that takes pops at Donald Trump. They’re doing what a lot of

From episode 1's opening sequence, *Grime Kids* aims to smash stereotypes. In a heart-thumping black-and-white scene, violence looks inevitable as audiences are dragged into the world of gritty gangland drama. But when the playground battle commences, the weapons of choice turn out to be water pistols and handfuls of flour. It's a powerful introduction to the Technicolor, joyous world of Theresa Ikoko's *Grime Kids*.

The BBC Three series is based on grime legend DJ Target's autobiography of the same name. It takes us back to Bow in east London, in 2001, when the city's underground jungle, garage and hip-hop music scene shaped the genesis of grime and Target's formative years. Yet, as a nostalgic coming-of-age series about friendship and growing pains, it has more in common with *Derry Girls* and *Raised by Wolves* than the likes of *Top Boy*.

"The opening is very deliberate," says executive producer Tom Leggett of Mammoth Screen, which made the series. "You expect to be in the *Kidulthood/Top Boy* space, and then, suddenly, you're exploding into a water and flour fight. All credit to *Top Boy* – it's been a hugely successful show, and it's incredibly well written, acted and directed. But *Grime Kids* depicts the flip side of the British urban life they're portraying. It's warm, celebratory and fun in tone, rather than about violence or criminality."

The idea began in the offices of Mammoth, which was looking for a show that spoke to Britain's role in contemporary international music. The biography of BBC Radio 1Xtra presenter DJ Target – a founding member of grime collective Roll Deep, which also featured Skepta, JME, Wiley and Dizzee Rascal – was perfect source material.

To flesh out a story, they approached Ikoko, who had grown up in nearby Hackney, one of nine siblings born to a single Nigerian mother. While working a day job in the community and youth services sector, Ikoko made waves as the writer of the award-winning play *Girls* – about the friendship of three young women kidnapped by Islamic extremists – and the 2019 social realist film *Rocks*.

Ikoko has shifted the focus of Target's autobiography to the people

Music to our ears

Shilpa Ganatra speaks to the makers of coming-of-age drama *Grime Kids*, which celebrates young urban lifestyles



BBC

Grime Kids

and connections between the music. She recalls: “There was a little anecdote in Target’s book about him and his friends having a food fight with frozen patties in a patty factory, and that resonated with me. Those moments felt so magical.”

The book lays out the blueprint of the world they are in: we see Roman Road (Bow’s main shopping area), the Rhythm Division record store, and the tower block that houses influential radio station Rinse FM. But the story itself centres around the “Gladiator crew” – Dane (played by Yus Jamal Crookes), Junior (Gabriel Robinson), Kai (Shanu Hazzan), Bishop (Tienne Simon) and Bayo (Juwon Adedokun). They have just finished their GCSEs and have a summer of possibilities awaiting them.

Their rites of passage are painfully relatable: becoming tongue-tied with a crush, getting turned away from a club for a first time, discovering alcohol but quite not knowing what to do with it. Bayo confidently orders a sherry at a bar because he saw it on TV.

While these endearing moments give *Grime Kids* a broad appeal, Ikoko explains that the show was written primarily for families living on east London estates. “The hope is that other people who look like them or live like them will also feel loved by the story. I also hope that the specificity of the story brings out the universality of experience, so that people who live in a village in Leicestershire will think, I know what it is to fall out with a best friend. I know what it is to grieve. I know what it is to want to say to my dad: ‘I know you love me, but I wish you liked me,’” she says.

Casting was done via traditional and “open call” methods. Altogether, 600 young men auditioned for the roles, most of them through the open call system run by Bafta-winning casting director Jessica Straker, who specialises in representative and street casting (her credits include *Rocks* and Steve McQueen’s *Small Axe*).

People from non-acting backgrounds were contacted via ads, outreach and word of mouth. Ikoko says: “We wanted to make sure that anyone who wanted to audition had the opportunity to be seen.” This was how they found Crookes and Delove Akra, who plays Dane’s crush Genevieve – both of whom bring great talent to the show.

Ikoko says she was determined to

make auditioning a positive experience, “where people felt they got something from it, even if they walked away without a role”. Food was provided and some of the lengthier workshops were paid.

When it came to depicting real-life characters, the producers turned to the people the actors were playing; grime megastar Wiley spoke to Ivandro Cruz, who plays him in the show, while Rinse FM founder Geeneus, a consultant on the series, picked Jack Bannon to play him.

Target and Geeneus’s involvement in the production helped tease out the show’s authenticity. They offered rich detail on the music, lingo and aesthet-



ics of the time. Geeneus even loaned the original turntables and props used by Rinse FM. But, overall, the on-screen world was brought to life thanks to a passionate commitment from all concerned, not least the set designers and music department.

Leggett says: “One of the amazing things about making this show is that, for a lot of people who came to work on it, it wasn’t just another job. It reflected their culture and was personal to their lives.

“On a production level, it was a show that filmed in a lot of locations, which brings its own share of complexity. There were a lot of challenges, but lots of great people around us.”

It was Ikoko’s first foray into television, and she was struck by how TV differs from film and theatre – particularly the speed at which the process operates and the director’s role.

She says: “When I heard how late the director comes on board, I didn’t think that could work. How could a director come on board that late and understand what I want to do and how I want to do it?”

“Me and Abdou Cissé, the director of block one [of the episodes], had a three-hour conversation on the phone every day for a year before we started filming. We were committed to forming a bond and sharing that vision. We conversed about film and TV, about characters, about books, about the things I dislike and love regarding the portrayal of women.

“I learned from him as well.

“I learned the word ‘interstitial’ from him because he would ask me about how I wanted the world to breathe between the scenes. I started to incorporate that into my writing, and factor in these little delicate breaths.”

She adds: “It wasn’t the easiest show to make but the heads of department went out of their way to stay true to the show’s vision. As much as it was my vision, it was a vision that was pushed and pulled and grew around all the amazing artists who were so generous with their gifts.”

Grime Kids is an important step forward in showing off the multifaceted, characterful world of inner-city life, thanks in no small part to its focus on grime rather than crime. And that’s music to our ears. ■

The first of four episodes of *Grime Kids* aired on BBC Three on 14 November.



The art of the reboot

The greatest comebacks since Lazarus – or lazy commissioning? An RTS national event in mid-October that boasted a panel of executives responsible for resurrecting many entertainment shows offered some answers.

First, they discussed the key ingredients of a reheated TV dinner. “You’ve got to keep core fans happy, so you don’t want to deviate too much from the format,” said Katy Manley, MD of Initial TV, which makes *Big Brother*. The itinerant reality show opened its doors on Channel 4 in 2000, moved to Channel 5 a decade later and has now pitched up on ITV2 after a five-year breather.

But, Manley added: “It’s got to feel new – [*Big Brother*] has been on for a really long time; no one wants to see exactly the same thing that’s gone before, so you’ve got to put something fresh and exciting in.”

The ghosts of TV past haunt TV present and future with the return of *Big Brother* followed by *Survivor*, *Gladiators* and *Deal or No Deal*

Charlie Irwin, MD of Thames, which produces *Blankety Blank* and *Family Fortunes*, noted that these veteran series have a “game mechanic that the shows work around, [which] you don’t mess with – they’re simple parlour games that everyone can play along with at home”.

He added: “The fundamental game is the same and then we [add] all the other elements – hosts, celebrities, the set, music, style of question and tone – to try to appeal to a new, fresh audience.”

Blankety Blank has had a couple of revivals since it first aired in 1979 with Terry Wogan as master of ceremonies, and has been hosted by the ubiquitous Bradley Walsh since it returned to BBC One in October 2021.

Family Fortunes made its debut in 1980 with Bob Monkhouse at the wheel, with celebrity chef Gennaro D’Acampo presenting the gameshow since it was resurrected by ITV in 2020.

Juliet Denison Gay, Creative Director at Hungry Bear, which is bringing back *Gladiators* to BBC One – with, obviously, Bradley Walsh presenting, this time alongside his son, Barney – explained her thinking behind the reboot.

The question she asked herself was: “How do we get families back watching shows together, because we all know that’s quite rare?”

And the answer was sports game-show *Gladiators*, first broadcast by ITV in 1992 and briefly revived by Sky in 2008. “People just want to have some fun,

shut out a bit of the crapness of the world and have lovely entertainment television,” said Denison Gay.

Paul Osborne, a former executive producer of *Big Brother*, is producing a new version of competition series *Survivor* for BBC One, two decades after the original played out on ITV. “Not everyone in the UK will remember it and even if they do... they will remember it as this quite earnest social

Irwin added: “It is difficult to cut through with new shows and new ideas, and get those younger viewers in a family environment. Big brands and big shows are a way to do that.”

He also pointed out that, across the board, despite the huge publicity they are receiving in the press, reboots make up a tiny percentage of TV commissions. BBC Director of Unscripted, Kate Phillips, said earlier this year that

Panellists’ top shows to revive

Juliet Denison Gay: early-2000s Fox ugly duckling reality show *The Swan*

‘I imagine [people] would think it was morally wrong to bring that show back. It featured... women who... felt like shit and thought they looked like shit. The show would whisk them away... for six whole weeks... and they’d come back [looking] like a Kardashian...’

[It was] addictive telly – I loved it... Back in the day, it was even more shocking because... you were only just starting to notice that Botox was going on... now everyone’s doing cosmetic surgery, so I don’t think it would be that shocking [today].’

Paul Osborne: long-running MTV reality series *The Real World*

‘Doing *The Real World* in the UK – which no one has ever done. The way *The Real World* was cut was kind of the way that TikTokers, Instagram influencers and You-Tubers operate in the real world [now], so to capture that in a TV show would be good.’

Charlie Irwin and Katy Manley: Chris Evans’ Channel 4 shows *Don’t Forget Your Toothbrush* and *TFI Friday*

‘There is less and less live [TV]. Live stuff is really intoxicating, especially when it feels something really unpredictable could happen... you get that in [*Saturday Night*] *Takeaway* and you really got it in *Toothbrush*,’ said Manley. ‘*TFI Friday* felt really anarchic and fun... I would watch it [now].’

Irwin added: ‘It’s the chaos of live TV... everyone wanted to be in that [*TFI*] pub. I love those shows where people want to be a part of it, desperate to be there. Creating that would be [great].’



From left: Charlie Irwin, Katy Manley, Ria Hebden, Juliet Denison Gay, and Paul Osborne

Paul Hampartsourmian

experiment,” he said.

Recently, the show began its 45th US season. It was revived in Australia in 2016 and airs in other territories around the world, and has come back, said Osborne, as “a much bigger, more entertainment-based psychological and physical game than it used to be”.

RTS event host, the journalist and presenter Ria Hebden, asked whether “TV had become lazy in recommissioning existing formats?”

No, insisted the panel. “It’s hard to reboot something and do it successfully. None of the successful reboots could be perceived as lazy because you’ve got to freshen [them] up and appeal to new people,” argued Irwin.

Manley said that, rather than being lazy, these shows should be seen as a fillip for linear television. “The broadcasters are trying to drive... family viewing, shared experiences, live TV,” she said. “[Reboots] are not lazy; it’s [about] trying to galvanise the industry.”

revivals account for just 1% of the 3,000 hours of content she greenlights every year.

“Everyone’s looking for guarantees,” said Denison Gay. “So, it’s a reboot, or it’s a format that’s been optioned from somewhere else or it’s about the talent – it’s never as simple as just an idea. You have to find so many different parts of the jigsaw puzzle to persuade a commissioner to go for it.”

Irwin summed up: “People might have ideas of how to refresh shows or talent might come to you and say, ‘I love that show,’ but, first and foremost, it is, ‘What are the broadcasters looking for?’ and, ‘What does the audience want?’” ■

Report by Matthew Bell. The RTS national event ‘The art of the reboot’ was held at the Regent Street Cinema in London on 17 October. It was hosted by Ria Hebden, and produced by Sarah Booth and Andrew Francis.

When victims can trust film-makers



From left: Stacey Dooley and Mina Smallman

Philip Barnes

In May this year, police chiefs declared violence against women and girls a national threat in recognition of some shocking statistics: in the year ending March 2022, 194,683 sexual offences were recorded against women and girls in England and Wales; 9% of women aged 16 and over were victims of domestic abuse; and 3% of women aged 16 and over were victims of sexual assault.

The RTS hosted an important session last month, chaired by TV presenter Sean Fletcher, to discuss the problem and how factual TV has responded to it. It also outlined some of the ethical challenges involved in making programmes about the issue. The audience heard the powerful testimony of the families of three victims, as well as from the makers of three documentaries.

Two Daughters, shown on BBC Two, told the appalling story of how Metropolitan Police officers took selfies beside the bodies of two murdered sisters, Bibaa Henry and Nicole

An RTS event analyses three documentaries that sensitively handle crimes against women

Smallman, after they were discovered in a north London park in 2020. The panel included the women's mother, Mina Smallman, presenter Stacey Dooley and director Jermaine Blake.

The Bafta- and Grierson Trustees Award-winning *Libby, Are You Home Yet?* is a three-part Sky Crime series that investigated the disappearance of university student Libby Squire on a night out in Hull in 2019. On the panel with

its director, Anna Hall, was Libby's mother, Lisa Squire.

Channel 4 series *24 Hours in Police Custody* included an edition in which Bedfordshire Police investigated a case of alleged grooming and multiple abuse. It was also directed by Blake.

Discussing these documentaries in turn, the producers and their subjects shared their motivations for bringing the stories to screen.

Dooley began: "We didn't have a budget when we started filming. We didn't have a commission, but we were not doing it for that. I did it because Mina called me and said: 'I want you to make this film about my girls.'"

The presenter asked the grieving mother: "I'm a white woman. Should it be a black woman presenting this documentary?" Smallman told her: "Stacey, we're black women, we know what we're going through. We are tired of being outraged. We need you to be as outraged with us, collectively. This is a societal problem."

Dooley said her team's focus was on

**'THIS IS NOT
SENSATIONALISM,
THIS IS NOT
ENTERTAINMENT'**

allowing Smallman to stay in charge of her own narrative: “We had countless conversations, we hung out and spoke a lot more when the cameras were off, and we’re pals. There was a genuine rapport there.”

Smallman was intent on telling not just the story of her daughters’ murders, but also how she felt let down by the police: “What the police had done, what they should have done.”

Blake added that everyone involved agreed they didn’t want to focus on the man who had killed both women: “We decided very early on not to include him, and to talk about his part in it as little as possible. What we were trying to do in the film was to bring out and understand the richness of their lives and, through their tragedy, try and make some sort of change.”

In the same way as Smallman has channelled her grief into conversations with the police to help improve processes, Lisa Squire, Libby’s mother, now speaks to young people across the UK about how to keep themselves safe while socialising.

She said the only reason to participate in a film about her daughter’s murder was to effect change: “I would only do it if it came from a point of learning, because Libby was passionate about education and learning.”

She remembered being approached by multiple documentary producers in the aftermath of her daughter’s death: “They wanted to tell the sensational side of Libby’s story: ‘Drunken student raped and murdered by Polish butcher.’ What they should have said is: ‘Girl killed by man.’”

Squire, along with Humberside Police, chose Hall to direct because of her wish to raise awareness through her film. Hall remembered thinking: “This is not sensationalism, this is not entertainment.”

Like Blake, Hall wanted to concentrate on the life of the person, not the death. She said: “We really wanted people to fall in love with Libby and we wanted to reflect her accurately. Our situation was different from Mina’s in terms of how the police responded. Humberside Police were incredible. They gave us every asset they had. They gave us logbooks, they gave us all the CCTV, they helped us to understand every minute detail of the inquiry.”

Both Mina Smallman and Lisa Squire recounted their battles with the press in the midst of their grief. For Smallman, this was bound up with the discovery

that her daughters’ deaths would never attract the same amount of attention given to a white woman. She remembered: “Someone sent me an article titled ‘Missing white girl syndrome’. I’d never heard of it before, but I knew it wasn’t the journalists or film-makers who were doing it that way. It was the editors or the producers who were deciding how important people were.

“I’m part of the human race, but I have to speak up for women of colour because we’re the last to be thought of, we’re the last to be taken care of, we’re the last to be protected. I know that now, but I have to do it for everyone. I do it for every woman and girl. But

and they go through exactly what’s happened. We had to maintain a relationship with the victims. They can access counselling at any point – straight after the film goes out, during filming or for years afterwards. They also always have a point of contact for [their dealings with] us.”

Hall agreed that this duty of care was paramount: “It’s not a question of us turning up, making a film, and then saying goodbye.

“We wanted Libby’s friends and the people who were with her on the night to be involved. That’s a very delicate series of conversations, because we have a duty of care to all those young people.”



From left: Sean Fletcher, Stacey Dooley, Mina Smallman, Jermaine Blake, Lisa Squire and Anna Hall

Philip Barnes

I say: ‘Hey, I’m a woman of colour, we’re important, too.’”

For Squire, the big shock was that, wherever the police went to search for her daughter, the press were right behind them, even putting the investigation at risk by offering to pay for tip-offs.

She said: “The press should not be buying information that could be prejudicial to the case. Holding the police to ransom, which was exactly what they were doing, should just not happen.”

For producers, their duty of care to the participants was a particularly important aspect of this kind of documentary-making, said Blake. He described *24 Hours in Police Custody*’s “robust aftercare programme”, which was necessary because victims could be left with so little time for themselves due to the demands of police and TV interviews.

He explained: “We approach these victims right after they’ve given an ABE – that’s [short for] Achieving Best Evidence. They sit in a room for hours

This session, although understandably emotional at times, ended on an upbeat note, with Smallman and Dooley presented with the RTS East On-screen Personality Award. This was in joint recognition for their work and commitment to investigative journalism and activism directed at ending violence against women and girls.

Just before, Smallman and Squire spoke about the comfort that making and watching the films had brought them. Smallman told the audience: “It enabled me to unpack all the stuff that we were going through. I put it on sometimes because I’m still processing [the experience].”

Squire agreed: “Like Mina, I watch it quite frequently because it’s my Libby time. It gave Libby her voice. I didn’t find it difficult at all. I found it cathartic.” ■

Report by Caroline Frost. ‘Televising violence against women and girls’ was an RTS East and RTS London event held at the Everyman, King’s Cross, London, on 16 October. The producer was Chiara Di Filippo.

Television distils a day of expert advice from leading TV practitioners at the RTS Student Masterclasses 2023

Graft and resolve



Ash Atalla (right) and Tim Hincks

Paul Hampartsoumian

The RTS Student Masterclasses drew a crowd of more than 300 this month to hear four of the industry's top talents talk about their careers and offer first-hand advice on how to make a start in television.

JOURNALISM

Inzamam Rashid, a Sky News correspondent based in the north of England, told the packed Journalism masterclass: "I always wanted to do the news, [as] a reporter, a news-reader or [working] behind the scenes."

As proof, the audience was shown a photo of Rashid in primary school, aged seven or eight and, inspired by having seen Trevor McDonald on TV, reading the news.

After university in Belfast, Rashid juggled three freelance jobs, presenting the breakfast show on a South Asian radio station, reporting for a commercial station in the daytime and doing a night shift at BBC Radio 5 Live, answering listeners' calls – all in one day.

"I remember [how] I had to hustle and graft, the amount of time, energy and effort I had to put in, the sacrifices I had to make – I had a girlfriend who said: 'I can't deal with you, you're too obsessed with news,'" he recalled. "I felt that, as a young Asian journalist, I had that extra wall put up that

I needed to knock down."

Rashid started a postgraduate degree at the University of Salford, but left when BBC Radio Manchester came knocking with the offer of a staff contract.

His first big story was the Manchester Arena bombing, investigating disturbing events at the Didsbury Mosque, which the suicide bomber had attended. In the wake of his report, which went out on TV, he received a job offer, for an initial four months, from Sky News.

Five years later, he is still there, having secured a world-exclusive interview with a Chinese diplomat accused of assault in Manchester, reported from Afghanistan in the wake of a devastating earthquake and investigated the lack of drug support for ex-offenders. Clips from all three stories were shown during the masterclass.

Summing up for interviewer Helen Scott the reason he is a journalist, Rashid said: "I want to tell people's stories and those [of] people who don't usually have a voice."

DOCUMENTARY

Clare Richards, who has directed numerous documentaries with sensitive themes, told her masterclass: "I've always been freelance and, by hook or by crook, I've managed to stay

in work and keep making films."

But it took a while to get started. Richards took a circuitous route into making documentaries, working in Manchester as a researcher on a Bob Monkhouse quiz and as a street caster on a Terry Christian-fronted discussion show, and then on a daytime property show in London. "I was desperate to make my own films... and the only way I thought I could do that was to get my own idea commissioned," she told interviewer Alex Cooke.

A BBC Three strand, *Fresh*, for first-time directors offered a way in, and *Disabled and Looking for Love* won her the Grierson Newcomer Award when aged just 26. With the £3,000 prize, she bought a camera and shot "anything and everything" to develop her craft and become a self-shooting director. It still proved tough to land jobs. She spent a year "trying to find directing work, even after I'd won an award and shown some talent for it," she said.

Slowly but surely, Richards built a career in docs, usually tackling difficult subjects. The audience saw a clip from Channel 4's *Bi-Curious Me* about women wanting to explore their sexuality, and a scene from the BBC *Horizon* film *What's the Matter with Tony Slattery?* in which the comedian revealed the sexual abuse he had suffered as a child. Of the latter, Richards said: "It was

a really challenging film to make [and] heartbreaking.”

Making her style of observational films requires sensitivity. Richards said: “You [can] sometimes feel as if you’re hanging around like a bad smell, [but] if people don’t want you there, they let you know, and you don’t film people who don’t want to be filmed.

“It’s about informed consent, making sure that people absolutely understand what it is you’re doing and why... over time, you develop a relationship that you’re both committed to.”

DRAMA

Steve Hughes is a multi-award-winning director on a wide range of shows. These include the BBC’s *Doctors*, *Casualty* and *Doctor Who*, Netflix’s sci-fi series *The Last Bus* and PBS period saga *Miss Scarlet and the Duke*. In his Drama masterclass, he said that directing was more akin to the work of “an interior decorator rather than an architect”.

Hughes explained: “Directors are brought in very late in the process... The building is already built, you just have to paint the walls a bit, change the light switches.”

During his conversation with Ben Tagoe he recalled how going to the local Odeon cinema in his native Wigan had been the equivalent of attending film school. “There wasn’t a lot to do, so we used to watch films all the time. I never thought I’d work as a film-maker.”

Nonetheless, he enrolled for a TV course in Newcastle and won an RTS award for a short film made as part of his studies. Moving to London, he was employed by BBC News as an editor, and he made short films in his spare time. A chance meeting with the BBC’s then head of drama landed him a gig on the daytime soap *Doctors*.

“Coming from an editing background is invaluable for a director because you learn that you can’t always get what you want, but you can get what you need,” he said.

A director’s job is half creative and half practical: “Part of it is how I am going to get this shot on time with the available resources. When you’re starting out, producers will want to know you can shoot to a schedule.

“Obviously, they will want it to look great, but they’ll need to know you can shoot 12 pages a day. On *Doctors*, I shot 28 pages a day, which is crazy but



Paul Hampartsoumian

fantastic training.” Regarding working with actors, Hughes said: “If you get the right actors, your job is 100 times easier.”

COMEDY

Ash Atalla is the CEO of Roughcut Television, one of the UK’s most successful comedy producers, whose award-winning series include *The Office*, *The IT Crowd*, *Stath Lets Flats* and *People Just Do Nothing*. He told interviewer Tim Hincks that one of the essential skills for being a successful comedy producer is knowing how to pitch a show to a commissioner.

“Never appear desperate, but appear in control of your facts. I’ve seen people fall to pieces in pitches,” was his advice to the Comedy masterclass audience. “Think of it as chat, because the people you are trying to sell an idea to need good ideas as much as we need them to take our ideas.”

However, it goes without saying that it is important to have an idea you believe in. “If you take in something shit, then you’re in trouble,” he warned.

Atalla emphasised that creating a show takes around two years and involves “an awful lot of blood, sweat, tears and creative risk”.

A lot of the time you leave “your heart on the desk” when dealing with

commissioners, he said. Being able to cope with rejection is essential. “It’s a business where if you thought about the number of times you get a ‘yes’, you’d never leave your bed in the morning. Probably it’s a 90% ‘no’ business.”

He added: “It’s a very strange, fragile process... I always say that comedy is the very opposite of maths. There is no rhyme or reason to it. You’re in a world where if you catch the wind on the right day, you might get a green light.”

Cast-iron confidence does help, as was demonstrated by Atalla’s huge belief in *The Office*: “We had a very strong sense that we knew what we wanted. I was quite cocky, and Ricky [Gervais] and Stephen [Merchant] wanted to direct. Not only did they want to direct but it was a deal breaker.”

For the BBC, the show had one clear advantage: “It was quite cheap to make so we flew under the radar. I don’t know if you could do that today.” ■

Reports by Matthew Bell and Steve Clarke. The RTS Student Masterclasses were held on 2 November at the IET in central London and chaired by media consultant Helen Scott (Journalism session), Alex Cooke, CEO of Renegade Stories, and Chair of Docfest (Documentary), screenwriter Ben Tagoe (Drama) and Tim Hincks, Co-CEO of Expectation (Comedy). The producers were Diana Muir and Helen Scott.



The Evermoor
Chronicles

Carole Solazzo
examines the splintered
world of children's TV,
talking to the kids
about what they watch
and the parents who
make the shows

A box of digital delights?

Disney+

Hands up everyone who was told off for watching too much television. And hands up who watched *Why Don't You Just Switch Off Your Television Set and Go and Do Something Less Boring Instead?*, the BBC One series that ran between 1973 and 1995. Irony, dead? It was slaughtered, stuffed and displayed behind glass half a century ago.

But what about today's children? If the primary school pupils of St Peter's in Newchurch, Lancashire, and Holly Mount in Bury are anything to go by, television viewing is still popular.

I asked the headteachers of the two schools, which are attended by my granddaughters, if I could come in and chat with different year groups and their teachers to find out what programmes these children watch and enjoy.

Children aged between six and nine watch TV with their families: *Bake-off*, *Strictly* and *Doctor Who*; sport, too. They like shows about the natural world, such as *Planet Earth*, and anything about dinosaurs. Many watch shows with younger siblings – but don't recognise the names of terrestrial channels CBeebies or CBBC, streaming the shows instead.

Some children watch other children play games such as *Minecraft* on YouTube because they like to see the children's reactions, and they pick up tips on how to play the games.

By Years 5 and 6 (ages nine to 11), though, the number of children watching television has fallen, and much more content is consumed on TikTok, YouTube and other platforms. They like watching children play computer games, unbox toys and enjoy stunts by the likes of MrBeast.

They still enjoy shows about the natural world and sport and watching Saturday-night TV with their families, but many of these children have "graduated" to watching content intended for an older demographic. *The Simpsons* on Disney+, Channel 4's *Young Sheldon* and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* are popular, as are scarier shows such as *Wednesday* and *Stranger Things* on Netflix; plus factual programmes such as *Save Our Squad with David Beckham* on Disney+.

Naturally, many people working in TV are also parents. Those with older children note that the outlook is even less rosy for traditional networks. "My boys don't watch terrestrial channels, they watch YouTube," says Terri Dwyer, producer at indie Buffalo Dragon and the mother of teenage boys. "You can't stem that flow now... but the terrestrials need to bring back particularly the older young audience."

VFX artist on CBBC show *Andy and the Band* Jonathan Shine, a father of teenage girls, agrees: "I've seen the transition away from kids' TV to YouTube." And it matters, he says, because "kids' TV, like great kids' literature, is educational". He sums up the best children's TV as "magic, morals and mischief".

"Home-grown kids' television is exceptional," says production designer Mitch Silcock (*Henpocalypse*, *Andy and the Band*). "You get a lot of moral guidance from TV. Do you want them watching YouTube, which is just selling them products repeatedly, with no story, no message and no journey?"

He continues: "We have an obligation to make sure that we're delivering

wholesome messages, lessons learned about teamwork or relationships, and in ways we would like all children to carry forward as grownups.”

Dwyer believes: “It is really important to ensure that storytelling reaches a young audience.”

“As a designer,” says Silcock, “the word I always use is ‘aspirational’. [Children] don’t want to see recreated the world as they perceive it. They want to see a world they would love to live in.... If you’re showing a school on TV, you want the kids watching to be desperate to go to that school.”

“VFX are definitely the ‘magic,’” says Shine. “They look great, and they’re fun, adding the garnish to a perfect plate.” Moreover, “VFX can help children understand narrative... attract their attention to a certain part of the screen, stimulate the child visually to help them understand something.”

Prop-maker Martin Hall also aims to stimulate children’s imaginations: “It’s about shapes, unnatural bright colours, the way things move. Is [the gadget] similar to things like animals or robots? Then, if it’s a ‘good’ prop that does something playful, give it a smiley face or add more curves and soft edges.”

There are many challenges in making live-action children’s TV and Dwyer picks some out: “[Children] can only be on camera for a certain amount of time. They need breaks. You have to bank schooling into your budget if they work for a number of days.”

Some children’s shows are low budget. Despite that, however, according to director Jordan Hogg (*Ralph & Katie*, *The Evermoor Chronicles*), *Evermoor* was “wildly ambitious. What made it easy to film was that it was Disney. Every morning, literally everything had to be run through the company and nailed. That negated any possible problems, and you could really focus what you spent your money and time on – and be creative.

“From a director’s point of view, directing kids is very different from directing adults,” Hogg continues. “It’s about helping them enjoy the experience, keeping a fun atmosphere, playing games to keep their energy up.”

He talks about the duty of care to children in emotional scenes, and “if I want a child to look ‘in thought’ and I know they like football, I’ll get them to think about what squad their manager will put out this weekend. It gives the same outside expression

of thought while they’re thinking about something they can relate to.”

How do you get these shows in front of children? Dwyer says: “We’re seeing a massive growth in AVoD [ad-supported video-on-demand] such as YouTube. Pre-Covid, the thought of putting your programmes free on the internet would have been a horrifying proposition, but the blue-chip companies are realising that there’s an awful lot of eyes on the free streamers – so playing their ads on those service is more beneficial perhaps. If you want to scoop up that younger audience, that’s where they are.”

Dwyer’s sons watch a lot of science shows but, she says, they don’t watch documentaries. “So, not only are we trying to access eyes, but the way we

it’s not put in front of the adults. They need to advertise to a wider demographic so that the parents think, ‘That looks interesting’, then put it on and encourage their children to watch – rather than expecting the kids to pick up the remote and put it on.”

Marshall McLuhan, the 1960s communications guru, argued in his groundbreaking work *The Medium Is the Message*: “We shape our tools, and then our tools shape us.”

Mass communication, as disseminated by the television set, he posited, would create a “global village” and a worldwide conformity of thought processes.

But will the many screens and countless content platforms now do the opposite, splintering the world into



are positioning and naming our content is important,” she observes.

“The trick that is missing in children’s drama is event telly,” believes Hogg. “[Children’s TV] needs to get everyone round the telly at once, like when *Doctor Who* came back or *Merlin* started on BBC One.”

Furthermore, he suggests: “I couldn’t tell you at the moment what’s on CBBC or any of the kids’ channels because

fragmented units where content comes at you fast and indiscriminately? As William Empson says in his poem *Let It Go*: “The more things happen to you the more you can’t tell or remember even what they were.”

Will a different way of viewing lead to children processing their thoughts in different ways from everyone else? And, therefore, do our children need to watch not less TV but more kids’ TV? ■

Black comedy at the court of the Sun King

So here's a promise: this is going to be the only review of Michael Wolff's book on Fox News and the Murdoch succession that doesn't bang on about *Succession*, the TV series.

It now seems obvious that art (the TV series) began by imitating life (Rupert Murdoch and the battle to inherit his crown) and life has now returned the favour. But this is well-trodden terrain.

Wolff, the chronicler-in-chief of the Trump White House, with his unflinching nose for black comedy and the unattributable but wildly entertaining quote, now provides a similar service to the Murdoch clan and the panjandrum of Fox News, Murdoch Sr's Frankenstein creation; Wolff argues that Murdoch barely watches the channel and that, if there is any blame to shoulder, it belongs to Roger Ailes, its now-deceased demonic genius.

The story Wolff has to tell is crazily plausible, often comedic, even if we can never be entirely certain it is all true. So, on the key question of Jerry Hall and scrambled eggs, "It seemed that Jerry Hall's central purpose... was to make [Murdoch] scrambled eggs", a comedic put down directed at both husband, now aged 92, and his fourth wife. As put-downs go, this wouldn't be out of place in, say, the great satirical novel by his near namesake, Tom Wolfe, author of *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. But this is not a novel, it is an extended piece of reportage, told from the inside, with lots of privileged access to the key players.

So what, in the end, are the *The Fall*'s key revelations about the Murdoch empire? That is to say, the revelations that are – maybe, probably – true?

First, there is the claim, contained in the book's subtitle, that we are witnessing the final days of the Murdoch empire. Curiously, it was while I was listening to the podcast *The Town* – highly recommended, by the way

Simon Shaps casts a sceptical eye over Michael Wolff's latest book on Rupert Murdoch

– featuring an interview with Wolff about *The Fall*, that news broke that Murdoch was stepping down as Chair of Fox and News Corp.

For that, let's give Wolff full marks. This does feel like the end of an era, and the book anticipates that with a prologue in the form of an obituary on the death of Murdoch. Death for media moguls is something that happens just a moment or two after relinquishing power, when they are finally forced to accept that they, too, are mortal.

Second, there is a question of what happens after the death of Murdoch to the remnants of the business he didn't sell to Disney in 2017. That is Fox News, overwhelmingly the major source of revenue, and the legacy print and publishing businesses that sit under the News Corp umbrella. Here Wolff excels, laying out how the voting structure in the post-Murdoch world is likely to play out, with voting rights split equally among four of his children.

In September, Lachlan was appointed Murdoch's successor. Here, he is depicted as the ambitious but asleep-at-the-wheel Fox News cheerleader, who wants to inherit what's left of the Murdoch crown and run the show. Wolff is not a fan. He writes that Lachlan has not "demonstrated any business acumen, anywhere, ever". Except to say that he is certainly savvy enough to know that Fox News is the cash cow

that underpins everything else.

But Elisabeth and James are critics of Fox News and they have the votes to determine the fate of the network. For transparency, I should say that James, clearly at a loose end during an RTS Cambridge Convention, once invited me for a drink. And his sister Elisabeth, while at Sky, asked a small gathering of Granada senior executives, of which I was one, to sell her *Coronation Street*. In her Shine years, I reciprocated by trying to buy the BBC's *MasterChef* from her. But this is all starting to sound like one of Wolff's anecdotes.

Elisabeth's solution is to sell Fox News, but James wants to keep it and turn it into a "force for good". This carries the risk that the channel, "whose very business model", says Wolff, "was to feed its audience a false vision of the world", will lose its entire audience of Trump-voting Americans.

Wolff says there has been no contact between the brothers for five years, and their views on Fox News seem irreconcilable.

With the fourth sibling, Prudence, vowing to go with the majority, and the two children by Wendi Deng, his third wife, inheriting a small fortune but no votes, Fox News is at risk after Rupert's death. And with it, so the argument goes, the Murdoch Empire.

Next is the account of Rupert Murdoch's chronic ambivalence about Fox News and some of its key personalities: Tucker Carlson, a man supposedly limbering up for a run at the White House in 2024, and Sean Hannity, a "moron", Wolff asserts.

Elisabeth, who now appears to be closest to Rupert, has counselled him regarding the danger that his legacy will come to be defined by Fox News, not least the public humiliation of the Dominion lawsuit.

Fox eventually settled the case, paying Dominion \$787.5m for falsely claiming on air that its ballot-counting machines were used to manipulate the

**'THIS DOES FEEL
LIKE THE END
OF AN ERA'**

2020 election in Joe Biden's favour.

When Ailes was around and before he was fired for sexual misconduct, Fox News operated as a "sovereign state", entirely in Ailes's image. After that, leadership of the network sat uneasily between Rupert (too old, too hostile), Lachlan (absent for much of the time in Australia, it seems) and its notional CEO, Suzanne Scott (always on the verge of being fired).

Apart from Ailes, the other figure behind the channel's growth was, of course, Donald Trump. But that relationship is now broken, the network having called the critical state of Arizona in the 2020 election in Biden's favour. That was a cardinal sin in Trump's eyes, compounded by Murdoch's championing of Florida Governor Ron DeSantis as the Republican nominee for 2024. Perhaps word also reached Trump that Murdoch had described him as "a fucking idiot".

So, in his final days, when Murdoch should be putting his feet up at his 340,000-acre ranch in Montana, he finds himself with no good moves. He can find no route to reconcile his three children by Anna, his second wife, and their widely divergent views about Fox News, which threaten its future and, by extension, all the Murdoch businesses.

Nor, it seems, can he find a way to maintain the network as the flag bearer for Trumpism, appealing to around one in two Americans, while falling out with Trump himself. And, having married four times, his hopes of finding a fifth Mrs Murdoch were shattered in the wake of supper with his latest squeeze, Ann Lesley Smith, and Tucker Carlson, when Smith put her hand on Carlson and said: "I believe you are a prophet from God."

Perhaps, after that, she went off and made them all some scrambled eggs.

But there may be one final move he can make. It is not one designed to reconcile his children or solve the problems at Fox News. As I write, I read that Murdoch is lining up a bid to buy the *Telegraph* newspapers. Newspapers, not TV or the movies, were always his first, and perhaps only, love. ■



The Fall: The End of the Murdoch Empire by Michael Wolff is published by the Bridge Street Press, priced £25. ISBN 978-0349128801



Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

‘But how big is his danda?’



Goodness Gracious Me – from left: Sanjeev Bhaskar, Meera Syal, Nina Wadia and Kulvinder Ghir

BBC

It is 25 years since children first ran around playgrounds shouting the catchphrase: “Kiss my chuddies!” And a quarter of a century since we laughed at the competitive mothers determined to outdo each other – one even demanding: “Yes, but how big is his danda?” – and winced at the rudeness of the ignorant diners “going for an English”.

To celebrate the silver anniversary of the trailblazing BBC sketch show *Goodness Gracious Me*, three of the creatives reunited at an event sponsored by the RTS Midlands centre in Birmingham.

Remarkably, the show still feels fresh and resonates today, which is a double-edged sword, according to one of its stars, actor Nina Wadia. She said: “I’m so incredibly excited that people still find it funny and still love the characters, but I’m so sad that it’s still relevant.

RTS Midlands celebrates the groundbreaking *Goodness Gracious Me*, which subverted racial stereotypes but is still alarmingly relevant

It shouldn’t be, we should have moved on more. Though I do feel there has been some progress.”

The creatives behind *Goodness Gracious Me* have undoubtedly aided that development. Writer Sanjeev Kohli pointed out: “We didn’t have role models, but hopefully we are the role models now. I hope we punctured a lot of things. We said things that needed to be said.”

Kohli, Wadia and actor Kulvinder Ghir reminisced and offered a fascinating behind-the-scenes insight to kick off the DESIblitz Literature Festival. It was fitting for RTS Midlands to be involved as it held a launch event in the city for the TV show 25 years ago at the BBC’s Pebble Mill Studios.

Goodness Gracious Me began as a Radio 4 series in 1996 before moving to BBC Two 18 months later, and ran until 2001. The ensemble cast were Wadia, Ghir, Meera Syal and Sanjeev Bhaskar.

It was groundbreaking for the way it explored British Asian culture, poking fun at stereotypes and turning the tables on white British views. Its most famous sketch was “Going for an English”, which parodied drunk British people eating at an Indian restaurant, being rude to the waiter, demanding the spiciest thing on the menu and ordering far too many poppadoms.

In the *Goodness Gracious Me* sketch, the Asian diners mispronounced the British waiter's name while ordering the blandest thing on the menu and 24 plates of chips.

Recurring characters included Mr "Everything Comes from India" (who claimed that even Jesus was Indian as he worked for his father and fed 5,000 people with very little) and the Kapoors, who called themselves Coopers and claimed to be entirely English. The Bhangra Muffins were two teenage boys attempting to be cool, calling girls "ras malai" and shouting, "Kiss my chuddies!" (chuddies is slang for underwear). Chunky Lafunga was an oily Bollywood superstar who called everyone "sweetie darling", while Mrs "I Can Make It at Home for Nothing!" ranted about everything being too wasteful.

Goodness Gracious Me grew out of a previous BBC sketch show, *The Real McCoy*, which featured black comedians, including Felix Dexter and Curtis Walker, plus Syal and Ghir. Its script editor was Anil Gupta, who went on to work on *The Office* and *The Kumars at No 42*. It was Gupta who approached broadcasters with the idea of an Asian sketch show.

Ghir explained: "Channel 4 thought it was a little ahead of its time. The BBC wasn't sure and said, 'Maybe we'll put you into radio', which did us a great favour. We could try out the sketches to make sure they worked verbally. When we won a Sony Award, the BBC gave us a 30-minute TV pilot, then six episodes made on a shoestring."

The cast quickly gelled. Wadia remembered: "We were so like-minded and had all had similar experiences. We had all been to an Indian restaurant on a Friday night with white friends who asked the waiter: 'Can we call you Sid?'"

"That sketch was holding up a mirror to people and saying: 'This is our experience as brown people.' It made the audience go: 'Oh, that's what we're doing', but they still laughed."

The creatives talked about the way they aimed to educate through comedy, highlighting issues while making viewers laugh.

Ghir added: "We turned the tables many times. We said: 'We're not stupid, we know what your behaviour is like, but we're no better. Let's put down our weapons and look at our humanity.'"

Kohli talked about how the show "tapped into the laughter of recognition, which nobody had verbalised



From left: Sanjeev Kohli, Nina Wadia and Kulvinder Ghir

jas Sansi

before". As an example, he recalled "a sketch about Asian *MasterChef*, set in India. Kulvinder described his first course as an elaborate dish from the court of an emperor, then the main was an entire goat marinated for six weeks. What about pudding? 'Fruit cocktail with Tip Top [a tinned creamy topping]. That's what happened if we went to friends' houses for dinner. You'd get the best food, beautiful biryanis and fluffy naans, then fruit cocktail with Tip Top."

"I sent the sketch to Anil and he said he didn't get it. But when they recorded it, there was a rollercoaster laugh of recognition, with people saying: 'I thought that was just in my house.'"

While some of the characters may appear exaggerated, Kohli said: "You'll usually find they are based on something that actually happened."

In fact, they were occasionally ahead of their time. Kohli revealed: "I invented a character quite early on who we thought was too far-fetched. It was based on someone I knew, an Asian who hated Asians and had a sticker above his bed saying: 'This is a Paki-free zone.' Extraordinary and clearly not true whenever he got into bed."

"I found this level of denial hilarious and I wanted to do something with that, inventing an Asian woman in the Cabinet, but then I thought: 'They're not going to buy that.' Then Suella Braverman arrived!"

Wadia remembered: "We were filming the Coopers in Ealing Broadway shopping centre when a real-life

Dennis Cooper appeared. He was very angry and said: 'Stop showing white people that some of us want to be white.' He took offence that he had recognised himself, but that's the sort of person we want to offend."

"The most complaints we got was when the Coopers became Christians, and when he took the communion wafer he asked for a pickle. People said how insulting it was. It was a fine line, but we weren't making fun of the body of Christ, we were making fun of the character and what an idiot he was. There was actually very little criticism from our own community."

Kohli said: "We weren't trying to offend. We always thought about the intended victim, and we were careful not to punch down. Most people who complained were just too thick to get the joke."

Ghir pointed out: "It was such a British show, sarcastic and tongue-in-cheek. We were influenced by things such as *Monty Python's Life of Brian*. We thought: 'It's time for us to speak out and you've given us the tools to do it. If you don't get it, that's your problem.'"

"Instead of turning the other cheek and not causing trouble, a generation of us was saying: 'No, it's time we stood up for ourselves.' Not using fist fights, but wit." ■

Report by Roz Laws. 'Goodness Gracious Me – from writing to screen' was sponsored by RTS Midlands and held at Symphony Hall in Birmingham on 20 October. It was produced by DESIBlitz.

RTS NEWS

RTS Yorkshire

BBC One crime drama *Happy Valley* went nap at the RTS Yorkshire awards last month, with five awards, including: Drama; Actor, for the star of the series, Sarah Lancashire; and Writer, for the show's creator, Sally Wainwright.

The third and final series, made by Lookout Point TV and shot in the Calder Valley, also nabbed awards for Professional Excellence: Post-production and Professional Excellence: Drama and Comedy Production.

A deeply moving programme about former Leeds Rhinos rugby league player Rob Burrow, who has motor neurone disease, was a double winner on the night. He was the subject of *BBC Breakfast's Rob Burrow: Living with MND*, which won the News or Current Affairs Story and Single Documentary awards.

Fittingly, the RTS Yorkshire Awards were held at the home of Leeds Rhinos, Headingley Stadium, and hosted by ex-Rhinos and England player Jamie Jones-Buchanan.

Burrow, who was present at the awards, recorded an acceptance message. "I'm just a lad from Yorkshire who got to live out his dream of playing rugby league, and I accept this award on behalf of everybody living with motor neurone disease and for all those people who will be in the future.

"On behalf of the Burrow



From left: Phil Daly, Claire Ryan, Ben Kay-Coles, Lindsey Burrow, Sally Nugent, Richard Frediani, Sean Twamley and, at the front, Rob Burrow

Simon Dewhurst Photography

Burrow doc honoured

family, I would like to say a huge heartfelt thank you to the brilliant *BBC Breakfast* team. Without them, none of this would be possible.... Whatever your personal battle, be brave and face it. Life is precious – live every day to the fullest."

Leeds-based Candour Productions was named Production Company of the Year. It also took home the

Documentary Series award for Sky's *Libby, Are You Home Yet?*, which investigated the murder of Hull student Libby Squire, and the prize for Professional Excellence: Factual Production for Channel 5's *Cause of Death*, following the work of a coroner.

Another Leeds-based production company, Wise Owl Films, also won two awards: Factual Entertainment for

BBC Two film *When Tina Turner Came to Britain* and the Features prize for Channel 4's *Amanda Owen's Farming Lives*, which is presented by the English shepherd and writer, and explores the pressures on British farmers.

ITV Yorkshire bagged the two news prizes – News Programme for its report *ITV Calendar: The Death of HM The Queen* and News or Current Affairs Reporter for its journalist Helen Steel.

"It's been another outstanding year for production in Yorkshire across both scripted and unscripted shows," said RTS Yorkshire Chair Lisa Holdsworth.

"It's a testament to the fantastic skills, facilities and creativity that we have in our region. Long may it continue!"

Matthew Bell

RTS Yorkshire Television Awards winners

Drama - *Happy Valley* - Lookout Point TV for BBC One

Actor - Sarah Lancashire, *Happy Valley* - Lookout Point TV for BBC One

Writer - Sally Wainwright, *Happy Valley* - Lookout Point TV for BBC One

Single Documentary - *Rob Burrow: Living with MND* - BBC Breakfast

Documentary Series - *Libby, Are You Home Yet?* - Candour Productions for Sky

Factual Entertainment - *When Tina Turner Came to Britain* - Wise Owl Films for BBC Two

Features - *Amanda Owen's Farming Lives* - Wise Owl Films for Channel 4

High-volume Factual - *Renovation Nation* - True North for Channel 4

News Programme - *ITV Calendar: The Death of HM the Queen* - ITV Yorkshire

News or Current Affairs Story - *Rob Burrow: Living with MND* - BBC Breakfast

News or Current Affairs Reporter - Helen Steel - ITV Yorkshire

Presenter - Helen Skelton - ITV Yorkshire

One to Watch - Caris Feeney - Daisybeck Studios

Animation - *Ending Virginity Testing* - Motiv Productions

Production Company of the Year - Candour Productions

Professional Excellence: Drama and Comedy Production - *Happy Valley* - Lookout Point TV for BBC One

Professional Excellence: Drama and Comedy Post-production - *Happy Valley* - Lookout Point TV for BBC One

Professional Excellence: Factual Production - *Cause of Death* - Candour Productions for Channel 5

Sir Lenny Henry admitted he was unusually nervous before the Midlands premiere of his latest TV drama, because his family was in the audience.

Among those at the RTS Midlands screening and Q&A for *Three Little Birds* were his relatives, including his sisters and nieces. Introducing the six-part ITV drama – inspired by the stories of his mother, Winifred, about moving to the UK from Jamaica – he said: “I am chuffed to be here, but I’m really nervous. I want people to know it’s been a labour of love. I hope Mum would be proud, but this is for everybody. This isn’t just black history; it happened to all of us.”

The drama was created and written by Henry, who also has a minor acting role. It’s made by Douglas Road Productions, which Henry founded nine years ago and named after the road on which he grew up in Dudley, 10 miles from Birmingham.

It follows sisters Leah and Chantrelle and their friend Hosanna as they leave Jamaica in 1957 to start a new



Lenny Henry

Vivienne Bailey

life in England. Chantrelle stays in London to be a nanny while the other two move to Dudley to join Leah’s brother.

It is humorous and heart-breaking. The women are excited to sail to the land of Elizabeth Taylor and Yorkshire pudding, but the reality is much darker. They are met with hostility and racism, with signs saying, “No blacks, no Irish, no dogs”, and graffiti urging, “Wogs out”.

In fact, the creatives revealed that they played down the violence and oppression faced by the post-Windrush generation in this pre-watershed drama.

The director, Charles McDougall, told the RTS audience: “We held back. Lenny said that everything in real life was much, much worse than our script. We had to monitor and limit the swear words we used.”

Henry said: “My brothers were attacked in the street going to work every day.

I experienced racism on my way to school and bullies beating the crap out of me. If you lashed out because someone called you a name, you could be fighting all day.”

Director Darcia Martin added: “We want viewers to empathise with the characters without feeling lectured. We don’t want to alienate people.”

The drama was shot on location in Birmingham, Dudley and the Dominican Republic, while interior sets were built inside a former Ikea store in Coventry.

McDougall told the RTS audience: “The hardest thing was finding a ship. We thought we were going to have to use a green screen until we found an old party ship in North Wales. It was rusting away and very dangerous, but we painted it and floated it.”

Producer Stella Nwimo said of the show: “I felt it was important to have diversity in our crew from the top

down.” Henry added: “It was a really inclusive set. We had a black guy wafting the smoke, which I’ve never seen before. The catering crew even made us jollof rice along with Irish stew.”

Asked whether he hopes *Three Little Birds* will help people to understand what it’s like to be an immigrant, Henry said: “That’s a lot to put on a TV show. I hope it resonates with people and helps them to imagine what it’s like to come here.

“The fact that people are still having these experiences now is shocking to me. I want people to enjoy the drama but also to think about these things.” ■

The Three Little Birds screening and Q&A, hosted by Suzanne Virdee, was an RTS Midlands and Create Central event, held at the IET Austin Court in Birmingham on 19 October. The producers were Kully Khaila and Rachael Ward.



From left: Suzanne Virdee, Lenny Henry, Darcia Martin, Charles McDougall and Stella Nwimo

Vivienne Bailey

Going back to his roots

RTS Midlands Lenny Henry’s new drama for ITV was inspired by his family’s arrival in the UK in the 1950s. **Roz Laws** reports

TV and film come together in Cambridge

East Centre Cambridge-based visual effects studio Vine FX and RTS East teamed up in October to host “Cambridge film people”, a networking evening for those working locally in film and TV, aimed at kickstarting collaborations. It featured talks from local businesses, including production companies and directors.

“There’s a thriving community of film-makers and designers in Cambridge,” said Laura Usaite, Vine FX MD. “It’s important for us to help showcase the creative industries, particularly now. A vibrant set of businesses exists throughout Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and Norfolk.”

RTS East Chair Rachel Watson said: “Film and TV

people across the east of England have told us they struggle to make connections with other industry professionals in the region.

“We were thrilled when Vine FX suggested a networking event in Cambridge. The city is home to so many creative people working in film and TV and there’s so much scope for

collaboration. This event was about making that happen.”

About 70 people attended at Novi in Cambridge.

RTS East hopes to put on more such events, with one in Norwich in the New Year. “We’re excited about working with [Vine] ...to bring a real boost to the industry in the city and across the wider region,” said Watson.

RTS Yorkshire Two recent observational documentaries – both made in Yorkshire – have taken viewers into the world of the British military.

Paul Wells, series director of BBC One doc *Soldier*, and Mark Tattersall, executive producer of Channel 4’s *Top Guns: Inside the RAF*, discussed making the docs at an online RTS Yorkshire event last month.

For *Top Guns*, Leeds-based True North Productions took cameras inside Scotland’s Lossiemouth airbase and the planes policing Nato airspace. Tattersall, an experienced hand at making military docs – he worked on Channel 5’s *Warship: Life at Sea* – said the RAF wanted to “showcase what it did [and was offering] access to nearly all areas”.

True North won the tender to make the series but, Tattersall said: “Winning the access was one thing, making the show another. [The RAF] was not geared up to inviting cameras in – they hadn’t realised what that actually meant.

“In the early days, they almost treated us as a news crew with controlled access... it wasn’t true observational documentary storytelling initially; it took some time to learn together how to do this.”

To make the series, Tattersall said he needed “safe pairs of hands”. The



Yorkshire indies go yomping

military “are very sensitive. If you say something that’s out of step or not in line with their culture, very quickly your access can change. I said to everyone: ‘We’re guests in their house.’”

Wells added: “You need communication and people skills... it doesn’t matter how good a camera operator you are, if you can’t build [a]

relationship with the contributors, understand the culture of the organisation and navigate that culture.”

Soldier – made by Labell, maker of BBC series *Hospital* – follows infantry recruits as they leave friends and family for the army’s training centre in Catterick, Yorkshire.

“[It’s] all about the transformation... of a young

civilian into an infantry soldier who may be asked to go on to the front line,” said Wells. “We spent a lot of time talking to them... trying to find those [with] something about them... some spark.”

Soldier follows two women in the platoon. “They’re entering a male-dominated world and the extra challenges that gave them was really important to us... you are looking for diversity in your cast, also for great characters... with great stories. Both of those girls were great characters with good stories,” said Wells.

He continued: “We spent six months with these recruits trying to... find out who they really were... [which was] a challenge.

“[The army] doesn’t want people who are incredibly emotional; part of the process [with recruits] is to strip that away and build robust, strong people, who don’t show emotion and aren’t affected by all the things they may be asked to do.

“This was the most difficult, physical challenge of filming I’ve ever had... there was a lot of running.” One moment stood out: Wells was shooting in Scotland at 2:00am and, unlike the soldiers, didn’t have a night sight. “I fell into water up to my waist while recruits were just walking past me.”

Matthew Bell

I am convinced that public service broadcasting is essential to public life in contemporary Ireland, [but] I am also aware that what we have traditionally understood to be public service broadcasting may no longer be fit for 21st-century purpose.”

These were the forceful opening remarks of Moya Doherty in delivering the RTS Republic of Ireland’s inaugural Gay Byrne Memorial Lecture at the Light House Cinema, Dublin, this month.

Byrne, a legendary figure in Irish broadcasting, became the first host of the long-running chat show, *The Late Late Show*, in 1962 and continued until 1999.

Doherty’s lecture shed some light on public service broadcasting – what it is, what it’s for and what its future is.

Now best described as an entrepreneur, Doherty has been an RTE producer, including co-creating *Riverdance*, and managing director of one of Ireland’s most successful indies, Tyrone Productions. She also spent eight years as Chair of the RTE Board.

RTE is currently engulfed in a financial and governance scandal, which began when Ireland’s national broadcaster disclosed hidden payments to another *The Late Late Show* host, Ryan Tubridy. The scandal cost Tubridy his job and RTE Director-General Dee Forbes was suspended and subsequently resigned.

Doherty said: “One of the great sadnesses of this period is that serious errors of judgement have come to be seen as defining RTE rather than the exceptional work and societal benefit it engenders during, for example... the pandemic [and the] 2016 centenary.”

In her lecture, Doherty called for a total overhaul of the system of broadcasting in



Moya Doherty

Michael Chester

A complete overhaul

Republic of Ireland Agnes Cogan picks through Moya Doherty’s inaugural Gay Byrne Memorial Lecture in Dublin

Ireland, which is now funded by advertising revenue and a licence fee. She argued that public service broadcasting should not be restricted to news and current affairs.

Her recommendation to achieve this was a coalition of public and private bodies, rather than a monolithic structure which is, more or less, under state control.

She said: “Public service media must evolve into a wider collaborative partnership of key delivery partners, a partnership which includes, of course, government.

“The public service media

organisation should, in such a partnership, become a social and cultural broker for the creative industries space as a whole, acting as the driver and facilitator for new and groundbreaking productions.

“It should be the space where the most challenging and important debates take place, not just about news and current

affairs but about the social and cultural dividend which can emanate from such a partnership.

“In this partnership model, the public service body becomes the place where

innovation, research and experimentation take place, addressing, and hopefully offering possible solutions to, problems, technical and societal, which individual organisations and bodies would not have the expertise or resources to address.”

Doherty concluded: “It is imperative that public service media finds a form where it represents truth and trust to the people it serves... but it must make sure that, in developing its new model, no one is left behind.”

The broadcaster Pat Kenny, the successor to Byrne as host of *The Late Late Show*, hosted the lecture.

Among the audience were Kevin Bakhurst, the new Director-General of RTE, Paul Farrell, MD of Virgin Media Ireland, and JD Buckley, CEO of Sky Ireland. ■

‘PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING MAY NO LONGER BE FIT FOR PURPOSE’

Technology Centre Across the digital landscape, there is a clear and present danger of cyberattacks – and the broadcasting industry is not exempt. This risk was addressed by an RTS Technology Centre colloquium, “Cybersecurity for broadcasting”, in mid-October held at, and sponsored by, IMG Studios.

The opening speaker, David Cannings of PwC, gave an overview of the cyber security landscape and its impact on broadcasters. The threats, he said, come from a wide range of sources, including: sophisticated state actors; professional hackers with their own commercial sales targets; or simply unhappy individuals.

An incident was cited at the colloquium, where a critical national broadcast was taken off the air, causing substantial loss of money and trust.

Robin Bolden of Friend MTS gave a detailed description of video content security and the innovative measures being adopted to prevent piracy. In the fast-changing content environment, he said, anti-piracy measures must be constantly reviewed in response to the circumstances and threats.

Jesper Jensen of Eviden/Atos described what happens



The RTS cybersecurity colloquium at IMG Studios

Kara Myhill/Mark Couto

TV can beat cybercrime

during a cyberattack. He emphasised the importance of having well-rehearsed protocols for such an event and acting quickly once the threat is detected. The impact of not acting was substantial and in some cases had sent businesses to the wall.

Network expert Gerard

Phillips of Arista concluded with an exploration of network infrastructure and operations. Broadcasters need experienced and knowledgeable network specialists to review and understand the network design, physical architecture and operation, he said.

Like the other speakers, Phillips emphasised the importance of doing the basics well and then building on that – unsupported software or systems without the latest security patches do not provide secure defence against cyberattacks.

Tim Marshall

Bursary scholars chosen for 2023

RTS Bursary Schemes The Society has named the 44 scholars selected for its 2023 bursary schemes.

Thirty-four were chosen for the TV Production and Journalism Bursary, including Amelia Nicola, who was awarded the Steve Hewlett

Scholarship, and Cerys Horner, who won the Beryl Vertue Scholarship. The latter was introduced last year for a student with an interest in producing.

Ten scholars have received a Digital Innovation Bursary. Theresa Wise, CEO of the

RTS, said: “This year, we have received the highest number of applications to date.

“It is extremely important to the RTS to provide support, guidance and opportunities to the next generation who will be building and changing the UK and international television industry, and we couldn’t do this without the support and donations we receive – we are delighted for Apple TV+ to be on board this year.”

Apple TV+ has joined All-3Media, the Steve Hewlett

Memorial Fund, Hartswood Films and STV in supporting the bursary schemes.

The successful scholars receive financial support to assist with their expenses and living costs, and free RTS membership. In their final year of study, every scholar is mentored by an RTS industry member.

To date, the Society has invested more than £1m in the schemes and supported 325 RTS Bursary Scholars in their education.

Matthew Bell

RTS awards now open for entry

RTS Awards Entries for the RTS Programme Awards were welcomed from last month. Awards are made across 30 competitive categories. This year, the Soap and Continuing Drama category has been broadened to admit any drama series with at least 20 episodes.

Kenton Allen, Chair of the RTS Programme Awards, said: "This year is proving to be another year of outstanding creativity, and we have seen – and I am sure will continue to see – genre-defining, high-quality television hit our screens.

"The juries once again are likely to have some tough decisions to make."

The closing date for submissions, which are now accepted via the RTS website, is 8 December.

All programmes and performances must be delivered, by broadcast or online streaming, between 1 January and 31 December 2023.

The awards, in partnership with new sponsor Cast & Crew, will take place on 26 March at JW Marriott Grosvenor House, London.

■ Entries have also opened for the RTS Television Journalism Awards 2024, which will take place on 28 February at the London Hilton on Park Lane, in partnership with Wolftech and Dataminr.

Adrian Wells, MD of global news exchange ENEX and the new awards Chair, said: "The RTS is proud to showcase the amazing work of British-based media organisations, which consistently demonstrate the quality and diversity of their content."

The closing date for entries is 1 December.

Talent execs offer their top tips

RTS Futures BBC Studios in Wood Lane, London, hosted an RTS Futures event last month that put newcomers to TV in touch with top talent managers.

Talent managers from some of the country's leading independent producers, as well as executives from BBC Studios, offered advice on how to break into the industry. Among the companies represented were Shine TV, Lifted Entertainment, Studio Lambert and All3Media.

The sold-out event also posted an "ask me anything" table, at which seasoned industry execs from companies including Lime



Talent managers and RTS Futures members network at BBC Studios

Paul Hampartsoumian

Pictures, Chalkboard TV and Audible gave general career advice.

"Network your way into

TV: meet the talent managers" was produced by Callum Stewart, Reem Nouss and Melissa Clay-Peters.



Anne Mensah (left) with her Fellowship award, presented by RTS Trustee Sarah Rose

Paul Hampartsoumian

RTS honours telly's finest

RTS Fellowships The Society has announced eight new RTS Fellowships, including to four of television's leading contemporary dramatists. Jesse Armstrong (*Peep Show* and

Succession), Steven Knight (*Peaky Blinders* and the upcoming Victorian boxing drama *A Thousand Blows*), Abi Morgan (*The Hour* and *The Split*) and Jack Thorne (*National Treasure* and *His Dark Materials*) have all

been honoured by the RTS.

Ben Frow, Chief Content Officer, UK, Paramount; Anne Mensah, Vice-President of Content, Netflix UK; Rosemary Newell, Director of Content, ITV Media & Entertainment; and John Ryley, until recently Head of Sky News, also received Fellowships. Seven of the Fellowships were presented at this month's RTS Patron Dinner.

■ The RTS has also announced a series of new appointments. Kate Phillips, BBC Director of Unscripted, has joined the Society's Board of Trustees, while Clare Laycock, SVP Head of Content – Networks & Streaming, Warner Bros. Discovery UK & Ireland, has been named the new Chair of the National Events Committee, replacing A+E Networks' Heather Jones.

Across the UK, Sarah McCaffrey, BBC Business Development & Partnerships Manager, has been appointed Chair of RTS Northern Ireland, and Stuart Ray, Head of Skills and Development at IABM, is the new Southern Chair.

Matthew Bell

Bringing Brando to Britain

Book Review

There can't be many documentary-makers still working at 90. But former BBC and ITV journalist and producer Peter Williams is one of them. His memoir, *Being There: Titanic, Marlon Brando and the Luger Pistol*, provides a fascinating account of more than 50 years of intrepid, globe-trotting TV journalism.

We learn how persistence pays as, incredibly, Williams persuades Marlon Brando to narrate a three-part Thames Television documentary – the company's first to be filmed in colour – on Native Americans, *Now That the Buffalo's Gone*, a subject close to the actor's heart.

By virtue of Williams' doggedness and good luck, Brando agreed – and even waived his fee. Though he did charge expenses, including for two hotel rooms at the Hilton,



Thames Television

Being There: Titanic, Marlon Brando and the Luger Pistol by Peter Williams is published by PWTv, priced £16.99. ISBN: 978-1739441722



one for himself and one for his girlfriend – plus jewellery and flowers.

As Williams' then boss, Jeremy Isaacs, said: "It might have been cheaper to settle for a fee."

Williams was part of the team that discovered the wreck of the Titanic for

National Geographic in 1985. He also made films on the birth of the first IVF babies in the UK and the US.

As for the Luger pistol in the book's title, this is a reference to an incident that took place when Williams was working for Thames' highly regarded weekly current affairs show *This Week*.

He was interviewing a hitman who claimed he would kill anyone for £2,000. Williams asked him why he should believe a single word he said. At which point, the criminal paused, reached into his inside pocket and took out a revolver.

Elsewhere, the reader gains fresh insight into the execution of Ruth Ellis, the last woman to be hanged in Britain, the US space programme, and an intriguing encounter with the late Queen.

Steve Clarke

The UPSIDE

Don't be perfect, be creative instead

Wise words were spoken by the new RTS Fellows earlier this month when seven Fellowships were awarded at the Patron Dinner held in the palatial surroundings of One Great George Street in Westminster.

Around 100 RTS Bursary Scholars listened as television luminaries gave their tips to the TV talent of tomorrow. None was more heartfelt than screenwriter Abi Morgan, creator of *The Split* and *The Hour*.

She told scholars "The

blank page is your friend, it's forgiving. The bad lines are happy to be scrubbed out and you can start all over again."

Abi emphasised: "But you have to write. Do the work every day, especially when you feel like crap.

"Try and fill at least one page... Write, even if it is shit, and even when it makes no sense... Perfection is the enemy of creativity."

The writer with a titanium spine

The prolific Jack Thorne was another new RTS Fellow. He reminded students that programme-making revolved around teamwork.

He thanked the directors, actors and set designers who bring his stories to life.

"In television, authorship

is shared," he said. "I can't write what Robbie Coltrane's face is expressing"

In a memorable line from the evening's co-host, Simon Pitts, the STV CEO described Jack as "the tallest writer I know but also the most upright, with a moral code made of titanium".

Take your failures on the chin...

The third writer being awarded a Fellowship was Jesse Armstrong, co-creator of *Peep Show* and the show-runner on HBO's era-defining *Succession*.

To applause, Jesse praised British TV's exemplary news and current affairs shows, describing them as a civilis-

The man whose scripts

turn swearing into an art form said that TV wannabes needed to take their inevitable failures on the chin: "You'll feel humiliated but will come through on the other side and hopefully make that great work."

... And never take no for an answer

Ex-Sky News chief John Ryley pulled no punches as he offered his advice to any Bursary Scholars considering a newsroom career. He told them to always be accurate, question everything and never take no for an answer.

Netflix's Anne Mensah, also receiving a Fellowship, said hard work was essential and that the students should put "a lot of their heart" into their professional lives. ■

RTS Northern Ireland Television Awards winners

Brian Waddell Award - James Martin
Drama - *Doineann* - DoubleBand Films
Comedy - *Derry Girls* - Hat Trick Productions for Channel 4
Entertainment - *The Belfast Mixtape: Songs from Lockdown* - BBC NI
Factual Entertainment - *The Fast and the Farmer-ish* - Alleycats TV for BBC Three
Lifestyle/Features - *Chronicles of Strangford* - Waddell Media for BBC NI
Specialist Factual - *Brian Friel: Shy Man, Showman* - Walk on Air Films and Ronachan Films for BBC NI
Documentary - *Young Plato: The Philosophy Boys of Ardoyne* - Aisling Productions and Soilsiu Films
Current Affairs - *Spotlight: The Baby-maker Uncovered* - BBC NI
News Coverage - *UTV Live: Dying on the Streets* - UTV
On-screen Talent - *Jamie-Lee O'Donnell, The Real Derry* - Jamie-Lee O'Donnell - Tyrone Productions for Channel 4
Children's/Animation - *Silverpoint* - Zodiac Kids & Family Productions UK for CBBC
Original Music Score - Andrew Simon McAllister, *Nowhere Special*

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Children's/Animation - *Silverpoint* - Zodiac Kids & Family Productions
Original Music Score - Andrew Simon McAllister, *Nowhere Special*

RTS Cymru/Wales Television Awards winners

Industry Categories

■ **Drama** - *Life and Death in the Warehouse* - BBC Studios for BBC Three
 ■ **Comedy or Entertainment** - *Hywel Gwynfryn Yn 80* - Slam Media for S4C
 ■ **Factual** - *Miscarriage: The Hidden Loss* - ITV Cymru Wales
 ■ **News (Short)** - *The Afghan Children of the Urdd* - ITN for Channel 5
 ■ **Sports Documentary** - *Together Stronger* - Barn Media for BBC One Wales
 ■ **Children's** - *Y Goleudy* - Yeti Television for CBBC
 ■ **Digital Original** - *Solo and Unsupported* - Cwmni Da
 ■ **Drama Performance** - *Aimee - Ffion Edwards, Life and Death in the Warehouse* - BBC Studios for BBC Three
 ■ **Presenter Of The Year** - Chris Roberts
 ■ **Rising Star** - Luc Daley
 ■ **Multiskilled Journalism or Producer** - Tom Brown

■ **Location Manager** - Miglet Crichton, *His Dark Materials* - Bad Wolf for BBC One/HBO

■ **Production Manager: Drama** - James DeHaviland, *Willow* - Lucasfilm for Disney+

■ **Production Manager: Factual** - Lowri Farr, *Prosiect Pum Mil* - Boom Cymru for S4C

Student Categories

■ **Undergraduate: Animation** - Morlyn Sbwriel (*Litter Lagoon*) - University of South Wales

■ **Undergraduate: Drama** - Benighted - University of South Wales

■ **Undergraduate: Factual** - *Hudson's Story* - Cardiff And Vale College

■ **Postgraduate: Environment and Sustainability** - *Saviours from Extinction* - Cardiff University

■ **Postgraduate Factual** - *Ride the Spine* - Cardiff Metropolitan University

■ **Postgraduate Journalism** - *The Invisible People* - Cardiff University

■ **Craft Skills: Sound** - Matchiko - Bangor University

RTS West of England Television Awards winners

Scripted - *The Outlaws* - Big Talk Productions/Four Eyes Entertainment for BBC One
Natural History - *The Green Planet* - BBC Studios Natural History Unit, with The Open University, bilibili, ZDF German Television, France Télévisions and NHK for BBC One
Documentary - *Drugsland: Going Country* - Marble Films for BBC Three
Factual - *Trawlermen: Hunting the Catch* - Frank Films for BBC One
Factual Entertainment and Features - *The Dog House* - Five Mile Films for Channel 4
On-screen Talent - Bertie Gregory, *Epic Adventures with Bertie Gregory* - Wildstar Films for Disney+
Flying Futures - Abdimalik Abdullahi, *Drummer TV*

News or Current Affairs Story - *Decoy*, *ITV News West Country* - ITV

News or Current Affairs Journalist - Beth McLeod, *We Are England* - BBC Bristol for BBC One

Animation - *Sesame Street: The Nutcracker Starring Elmo and Tango* - Sesame Workshop and A Productions for HBO Max

Children's - *The Last Bus* - Wildseed Studios for Netflix

Short Film - *After the After Party* - Calling the Shots

Director - John Butler, *The Outlaws* - Big Talk Productions/Four Eyes Entertainment for BBC One

Composer - Jim Cornick and Matt Loveridge, *Rendezvous with the Future* - BBC Science for Bilibili

Cinematography - Cinematography Team, *The Green Planet* - BBC Studios Natural History Unit, with The Open

University, bilibili, ZDF German Television, France Télévisions and NHK for BBC One

Editing - *Editing Team, The Green Planet* - BBC Studios Natural History Unit, with The Open University, bilibili, ZDF German Television, France Télévisions and NHK for BBC One

Grading - *Simon Bland, Dynasties II* - Films at 59 for BBC Studios Natural History Unit

Sound - *Sound Team, The Green Planet* - BBC Studios Natural History Unit, with The Open University, bilibili, ZDF German Television, France Télévisions and NHK for BBC One

Production Management - Megan Pinches, *Trawlermen: Hunting the Catch* - Frank Films for BBC One

VFX and Digital Creativity - Lindsay McFarlane, Elliot Newman, Fay Hancocks and Andrew R Jones, *Prehistoric Planet* - BBC Studios Natural History Unit for Apple TV+

Man of the Midlands

Campbell relives moments

■ Students get sound and vision lesson

Shot by their own phone

■ Camerawoman and trainer Deirdre Mulcahy began her 'Production in your pocket' session for RTS London by sending everyone out of the room to record 20-second smartphone interviews.

It served as a jumping-off point for a look at examples of work by Steven

Soderbergh and Ridley Scott shot on smartphones to demonstrate how far these devices can go in the hands of expert cinematographers.

Mulcahy revealed how to get the most out of these powerful 'entertainment devices'. Tips on framing, sound and storytelling kept

the audience enthralled. A full house used the Q&A to ask about squeezing out the most from their iPhones and the best editing software to use. The event was produced by David Thomas and held at the University of Westminster in mid-May.

Phil Barnes

**'TOO MUCH LIP
SERVICE IS PAID;
YOU HAVE TO
ACTUALLY CREATE
OPPORTUNITIES'**



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