

November 2018

Television

**Why
daytime
rocks**





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From the CEO



We have enjoyed abundant and vibrant activity this autumn across our regional Centres, especially the North East, as well as in London. One of the

highlights was a packed early-evening event that tackled the complex question of how to successfully measure audiences in the multi-device era.

“Who is watching: The challenge of digital measurement” heard from platform owners, advertisers and Barb. It was great to also hear the perspective from Facebook and YouTube. A hugely insightful debate.

My thanks to all the panellists, to producers Terry March (the recent recipient of a Pilgrim Award) and Vicky Fairclough, and to the night’s chair, Kate Bulkley.

A very different event, but just as insightful was our latest screening, *Tiny Shoulders: Rethinking Barbie*, held at the Curzon Cinema in Soho. A massive thank you to Entertainment One for arranging this.

Director Andrea Nevins secured privileged access to the Barbie inner sanctum at Mattel’s headquarters in Los Angeles for her compelling film.

Following the screening, Andrea and Barbie design chief Kim Culmore joined us for a revealing question and answer session. I am very grateful to them for a thought-provoking evening.

Full reports of both these events are in this edition of *Television*. And I’m delighted that Mathew Horsman could find the time to write a piece for us on the deal of the decade – Sky’s acquisition by Comcast. As ever, his analysis is incisive and perceptive.

Also in this issue, two book reviews by eminent people about eminent people – Lucy Lumsden on Jon Plowman and Jon Thoday on Michael Ovitz.

Graeme Thompson’s interview with the director of BBC Two’s stunning series *The Mighty Redcar* turns the spotlight on the North East. The region is, of course, the location for MTV’s reality sensation *Geordie Shore*. So I am thrilled that we have a report from an RTS North East and the Border event dedicated to the show.

Last, but not least, Lisa Campbell reveals how daytime TV is going from strength to strength.

Theresa Wise

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Cover: ITV

Editor
Steve Clarke
smclarke_333@hotmail.com
News editor and writer
Matthew Bell
bell127@btinternet.com

Production, design, advertising
Gordon Jamieson
gordon.jamieson.01@gmail.com
Sub-editor
Sarah Bancroft
smbancroft@me.com

Royal Television Society
3 Dorset Rise
London EC4Y 8EN
T: 020 7822 2810
E: info@rts.org.uk
W: www.rts.org.uk

Subscription rates
UK £115
Overseas (surface) £146.11
Overseas (airmail) £172.22
Enquiries: publication@rts.org.uk

Printing
ISSN 0308-454X
Printer: FE Burman
20 Crimscott Street
London SE1 5TP

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Registered Charity 313 728

National events

RTS AWARDS

Monday 26 November

RTS Craft & Design Awards 2018

Hosted by Tom Allen

Venue: London Hilton on Park Lane, London W1K 1BE

RTS APPG

Tuesday 4 December

The future of TV journalism in an age of fake news and disinformation

Panel discussion hosted by Damian Collins MP, DCMS Committee Chair and Chair of the RTS APPG. Speakers include: Jamie Angus, director of BBC World Service; Jonathan Thompson, CEO of Digital UK; and Deborah Turness, President of NBC News International. Additional speaker TBC. 6:00pm for 6:30pm start

Venue: Wilson Room, Portcullis House, Westminster SW1A 2JR

RTS EARLY EVENING EVENT

Wednesday, 5 December, 2018

RTS screening of 4 Blocks

Joint event with TNT Serie/Turner and the RTS. Screening of the season 2 opener plus a Q&A with executive producers Hannes Heylmann and Anke Greifeneder from TNT Serie, Quirin Berg from Wiedemann & Berg and director Özgür Yildirim. 5:30pm for 6:30pm screening

Venue: Curzon Soho, 99 Shaftesbury Avenue, London W1D 5DY

RTS EARLY EVENING EVENT

Thursday 6 December

A TV Christmas Carol

Speakers: Kenton Allen, CEO, Big Talk Productions; Michael Grade CBE; and Kate Phillips, controller of entertainment, BBC. Chair: Anita Singh, arts and entertainment editor, *Daily Telegraph*. 6:30pm for 6:45pm start

Venue: The Hospital Club, 24 Endell Street, London WC2H 9HQ

RTS FUTURES

Monday 10 December

RTS Futures Christmas quiz

Venue: Channel 4, 124 Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2TX

RTS FUTURES

Wednesday 30 January 2019

Careers Fair 2019

Venue: Business Design Centre, 52 Upper Street, London N1 0QH

RTS AWARDS

Wednesday 27 February 2019

RTS Television Journalism Awards 2019

Sponsored by Guestbooker
Venue: London Hilton on Park Lane, London W1K 1BE

RTS AWARDS

Tuesday 19 March 2019

RTS Programme Awards 2019

In partnership with Audio Network
Venue: Grosvenor House Hotel, 86-90 Park Lane, London W1K 7TN

RTS AWARDS

Friday 28 June 2019

RTS Student Television Awards 2019

Sponsored by Motion Content Group
Venue: BFI Southbank, Belvedere Road, London SE1 8XT

Local events

DEVON AND CORNWALL

■ Jane Hudson
■ RTSDevonandCornwall@rts.org.uk

EAST

Wednesday 28 November

Can films make a difference?

Brian Woods talks documentary
True Vision founder Brian Woods in conversation with Catherine Elliott, Cambridge School of Creative Industries. Supported by StoryLab at Anglia Ruskin University. Places are free but must be reserved via RTSeast@rts.org.uk. 6:30pm. Followed by reception
Venue: Anglia Ruskin University CB1 1PT

■ Nikki O'Donnell
■ nikki.odonnell@bbc.co.uk

LONDON

Wednesday, 21 November, 2018

Google for media

Join us at Google's London HQ to hear about its latest developments in media and broadcasting. There will be refreshments and networking time before and after the main panel. Speakers TBC. 6:30pm for 7:00pm

Venue: Google, 76 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 9TQ

■ Daniel Cherowbrier
■ daniel@cherowbrier.co.uk

MIDLANDS

■ Jayne Greene 07792 776585
■ RTSMidlands@rts.org.uk

NORTH EAST AND THE BORDER

■ Jill Graham
■ jill.graham@blueyonder.co.uk

NORTH WEST

■ Rachel Pinkney 07966 230639
■ RPinkney@rts.org.uk

NORTHERN IRELAND

Tuesday 26 March 2019

RTS Northern Ireland Student Television Awards

Venue: TBC
■ John Mitchell
■ mitch.mvbroadcast@btinternet.com

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

■ Charles Byrne (353) 87251 3092
■ byrnecc@iol.ie

SCOTLAND

■ Jane Muirhead
■ scotlandchair@rts.org.uk

SOUTHERN

Thursday 22 November
Freelancers' fair

For all industry professionals in the Southern region (separate student events are run for those seeking work experience). You must sign up to attend as there will be a guest list on the door. Light refreshments. 7:00pm
Venue: Vestry Restaurant and

Bar, 61 Commercial Road, Southampton SO15 1GG

■ Stephanie Farmer
■ SFarmer@bournemouth.ac.uk

THAMES VALLEY

Friday 23 November

2018 Winter Ball

7:00pm till late
Venue: De Vere Wokefield Estate, Goodboys Lane, Reading RG7 3AE
■ Tony Orme
■ RTSThamesValley@rts.org.uk

WALES

Thursday 6 December

RTS Cymru Wales

Christmas quiz

Hosted by ITV Wales's Ruth Wignall. £10 entry fee includes a mince pie and a festive tippie. 7:00pm for 7:30pm start
Venue: Cameo Club, 3 Pontcanna Street, Cardiff CF11 9HQ
■ Hywel William 07980 007841
■ hywel@aim.uk.com

WEST OF ENGLAND

Wednesday 28 November

RTS West of England Futures Festival 2018

Aimed at final-year students, recent graduates and emerging talent in the industry. Part of Digital Bristol Week
Venue: Watershed, Bristol BS1 5TX

Thursday 6 December

RTS West of England Big Fat Bumper Quizmas

Venue: The Folk House, 40a Park Street, Bristol BS1 5JG
■ Belinda Biggam
■ belindabiggam@hotmail.com

YORKSHIRE

Wednesday 28 November

RTS Yorkshire quiz 2018

Companies can enter as many teams of five as they wish: £10 for each team, payable on the night. Cash bar available all evening. 8:00pm-late
Venue: Queen's Hotel, City Square, Leeds LS1 1PJ
■ Lisa Holdsworth 07790 145280
■ lisa@allonewordproductions.co.uk

TV diary

Rosie Jones on the fine art of procrastination, as she ignores pressing deadlines to hone gags



This week, like most weeks, has been a little busy. And when I say, “a little busy”, I mean rushed-off-my-feet-no-time-to-sleep busy. I

mean, is sleep really necessary?

I’m thinking, no, not really. Apart from the Bags for Life under my eyes, I am really happy, and every morning I wake up with a smile on my face. I still can’t believe that I get paid to make people laugh. I am living the dream.

■ I started the week by going back to my home town, Bridlington, to be the bit of entertainment at the region’s annual business awards. To be honest, it was strange to go back there. I’d forgotten how small it was. It was like going back in time.

I now live in the big, bad capital, and I’m used to the convenience and ease of London life. It was great to see some familiar faces, though, and it was a dream to perform at Brid’s theatre, the almighty Bridlington Spa, a stage I longed to be on when I was growing up.

■ Then it was straight back to London to do a couple of charity gigs. I know, I am a great person. The

charity gigs this week were to raise money for people with cerebral palsy and for Stonewall.

As a lesbian with CP, these two charities are especially dear to my heart. I often wonder what “good” I do in the world. I am a comedian who earns money by speaking about herself all day, every day.

I quite possibly have the most self-indulgent job in the world. So, sometimes, it’s nice to be a small part of something bigger, and to do a bit of good for once.

■ While gigging takes up my evenings, my days are spent in coffee shops, trying to order cappuccinos. But, as a result of my slow, slurred speech, I am often being mistaken for an uncertain Cockney – “Cappa tea, no?”

So, while I slurp my third unwanted English Breakfast of the week, I write. I am currently writing a couple of sitcoms, one for Netflix and one for the BBC. Both have imminent deadlines. Naturally, I have spent the majority of this week writing jokes for my Edinburgh show, which is 283 days away. Procrastination at its achingly finest.

■ The most exciting day this week was Wednesday, when I did a bit of

filming for BBC Three. I love filming days, mainly because of hair and make-up.

I never wear make-up usually and I only brush my hair on special days. When I get the opportunity to be pampered, it’s a real treat.

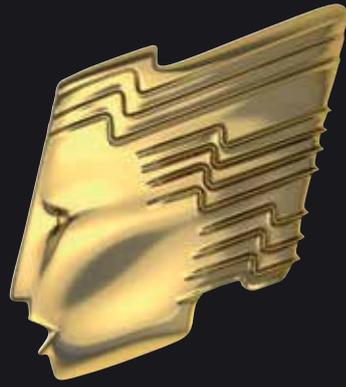
This filming day was extra special because I got to do it with my pal, fellow comedian Helen Bauer. She’s brilliant and very funny, but for God’s sake don’t tell her that, nobody needs their head getting even bigger.

■ When I’m not gigging, writing, or filming, I am bingeing TV shows. Big time. This week, I’ve gobbled up the entire series of *Killing Eve* and the entire series of *The Bisexual*, both of which I highly recommend.

They are flawless, and I now have two new major crushes: Jodie Comer and Maxine Peake. Dear Lord, they are magnificent.

■ Right, I’d better go. I’m just about to board a plane to Ireland. This weekend I am performing at Vodafone Comedy Carnival Galway. I’ve never been to the Emerald Isle before, and I’m rather excited to spend a long weekend drinking Guinness. Anybody know a good hangover cure?

Rosie Jones is a comedian and writer.



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Extreme Cake Makers

Channel 4

The rise and rise of daytime

Daytime TV has long been the butt of comedians' jokes. In an episode of *Mock the Week* last year, Hugh Dennis pretended to be a weary daytime announcer: "Well, because they're all the same, and I can't be bothered to announce them all, here's *Flog Dickinson's Antiques Sun Hammer Pointless Breakout in the Country...* finishes at 5pm."

And in one of his recent shows, Michael McIntyre said he hoped that

Daytime TV

Disdained by those who don't watch it, **Lisa Campbell** discovers that the genre is booming

he wasn't one of "those people" who watch TV in the daytime. "A lot of bloated women seem to be watching TV. Activia yoghurt. That's the solution." He went on to list DFS sofas, ads for anti-chafing cream and Michael Bublé as other daytime delights.

The reality, however, is that daytime TV is booming for many of the broadcasters and is attracting audiences beyond the stereotypical bored housewife and jobless graduate.

ITV daytime, particularly, is enjoying something of a golden age. >

› meaning that the once very-public woes of *Daybreak* – rock-bottom ratings and more reinventions than Marks & Spencer – are a long-forgotten nightmare.

The 6am–6pm daytime slot has increased its audience every year for the past four years, and this year is the best-performing since 2003 (with an 18.6% audience share for January to September).

That is partly down to noisy, headline-grabbing morning shows – and to one particularly noisy, headline-grabbing presenter, *Good Morning Britain*'s Piers Morgan. Pairing the irksome, controversy-seeking Morgan with the patient, consummate professional Susanna Reid proved to be the masterstroke that ensured that *Good Morning Britain* avoided the same dire fate as its predecessor, *Daybreak*.

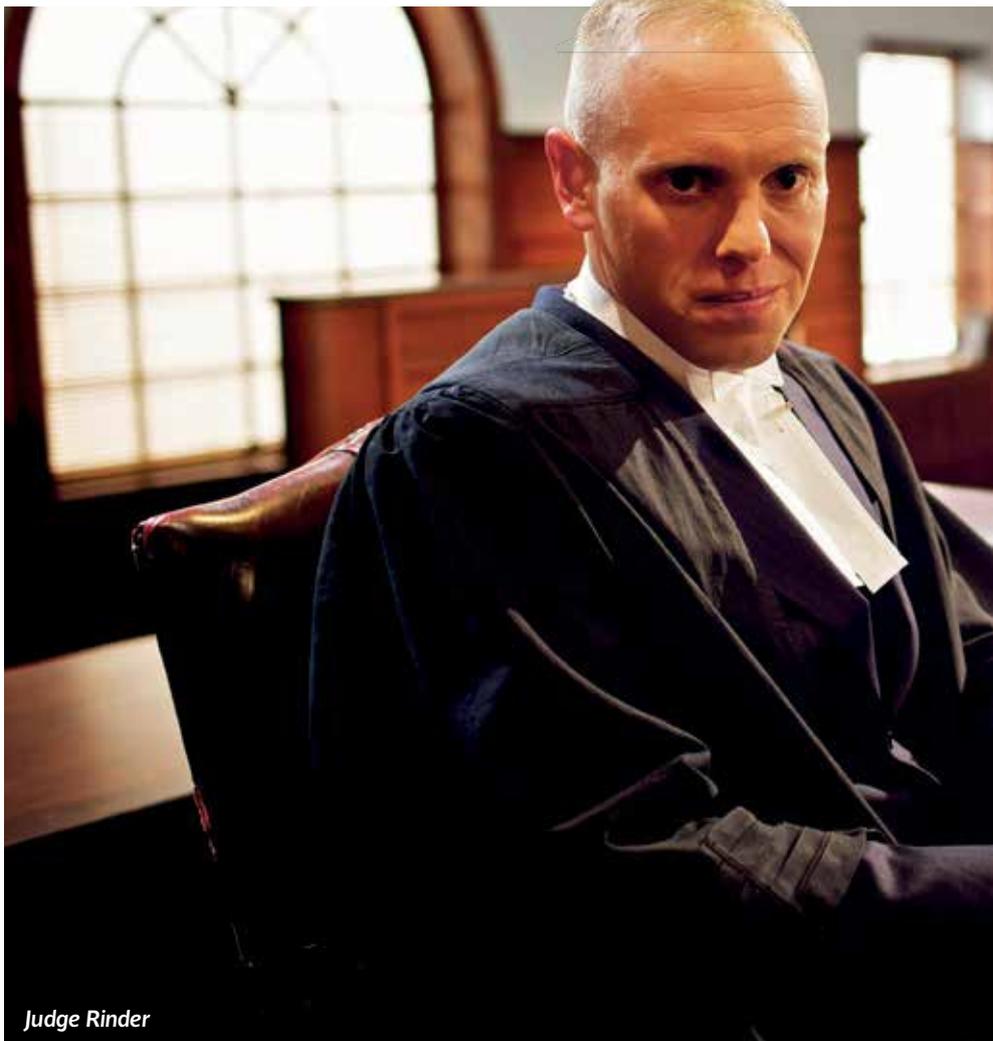
The show now regularly tops 1 million viewers and its share of viewing is up 17% year-on-year. It's also something of a social-media sensation – not just thanks to Morgan's provocative tweets, but to Reid's exasperated eye rolls and withering put-downs, which often go viral.

Another key to the show's success is its ability to land exclusives, from Thomas Markle speaking for the first time about his daughter's royal wedding, to Morgan's much-publicised interview with Donald Trump in July.

For the joint heads of ITV Daytime, Jane Beacon and Clare Ely, the show exemplifies what makes their daytime fare distinctive. "We're all about strong characters," says Ely. "From Piers and Susanna to David Dickinson, Jeremy Kyle and Judge Rinder, we're not afraid to be controversial. It means we get lots of attention and it gives us a very different tone to BBC daytime."

This Morning, ITV's late-morning magazine show and another stalwart of the schedule, has also been in the news recently. Its 30th anniversary special clocked up 1.8 million viewers and a 15% share – its biggest audience for nine years. The anniversary in October was marked with a Bafta Special Award, with former host Richard Madeley remarking that it was successful because "it plugged into the viewers, it belonged to them. It didn't belong to us or our production team, or Granada or ITV, it belonged to the viewers, and that was the key to it."

It's a tone and philosophy that successive teams have preserved through the decades. "The show belongs to the



Judge Rinder

'ITV DAYTIME... IS ENJOYING SOMETHING OF A GOLDEN AGE'

audience and they are so connected to it, even more so now with social media and the new *This Morning* app, which was number one in the App Store when it launched in October," says Beacon.

"And we have a symbiotic relationship with social media across all our shows," adds Ely. "We feed social media with brilliant content and, in turn, that's reciprocated."

This Morning, too, has benefited from securing exclusives – an extended special covered Princess Eugenie's wedding and secured 3.2 million viewers and a 45% audience share, its biggest audience ever. Not surprisingly, there's now an increased desire to gain

more access to the biggest stories and events.

When it comes to the afternoons, ITV scheduling manager John Williams has been keen to create greater consistency, since he joined the broadcaster a year ago. Instead of slots being in continual flux or filled with repeats, shows are now at defined times to reflect the fact that, while daytime audiences are loyal, they like routine.

"When you create consistency, you can build momentum. So, at 2pm, we have the three Cs – courtroom, crime and cooking [currently *Judge Rinder* rules here]; at 3pm, it's the two Ds, Warwick Davis and David Dickinson; at 4pm, it's *Tipping Point*, and 5pm is Bradley Walsh with *The Chase* or *Cash Trapped*."

With long-running and successful stalwarts in the schedule, it is harder to launch new shows – *The Chase* turns 10 next year and its audience share is up 8% year on year; *Loose Women* is 20 next year; *Lorraine* has been on for air nine years and its share is up 5% year on year.



8% year on year after a flat period, and, if current trends continue, it will be at its highest share for three years.

“These shows have benefited from advances in technology and are so well produced that the quality exceeds what you’d expect for a typical daytime budget. They can feel like peak-time shows, which is why we can attract a 45% ABC1 audience – that is high for daytime shows,” says C4 head of daytime David Sayer.

He adds: “These shows are also useful in a multichannel world, as they are able to sit on 4seven, More 4 and All 4.”

The other advantage of replacing a long-running show with a range of series is that production can be spread around the country as opposed to coming from one fixed creative base.

This is core to Channel 4’s remit, which is also behind a new, live daily show to be broadcast from its recently announced HQ in Leeds. “Now that we know where we’ll be, we can think about what sort of show this will be and who the talent will be. It’s an exciting prospect,” says Sayer.

For the BBC, cutbacks have already seen daytime programming reduced. With a further £800m of savings to find, some sources predict that daytime commissions will be cut on BBC One altogether and replaced with repeats – echoing the decision taken in 2011 to save £20m by ditching daytime commissioning on BBC Two.

In the meantime, though, BBC controller of programming and daytime Dan McGolpin has vowed to “modernise” BBC daytime by axing *Flog It* after 17 years to make way for new shows.

While several of those announced are in the traditional areas of housing, crime and cooking, daytime drama is on the up – with funding from overseas broadcasters underwriting prime-time production values on some BBC daytime shows.

These include crime drama *The Mallorca Files*, co-funded by French and German broadcasters. Meanwhile, *Shakespeare & Hathaway – Private Investigators* has been recommissioned after becoming the BBC’s biggest daytime drama launch since 2013’s *Father Brown*.

With a series of international deals on the cards, *The Mallorca Files* is expected to repeat the success of previous crime dramas *Death in Paradise* and *Father Brown*. Both have been sold to more than 200 territories.

Whoever said there was no money in daytime? ■

ITV

Nevertheless, Beacon stresses: “As a commercial broadcaster, it’s important to grow new shows – and to stick with them because, when shows fail, they fail fast. *Rinder* was a big risk as he was unknown but we stuck with it and now he’s such a big part of ITV daytime.”

Likewise, *Tenable* has gained momentum since its launch in 2016, averaging 900,000 viewers and a 14% share so far this year, which is up 240,000 viewers and four share points, compared with last year.

It does mean that there are no openings for producers until 2020, but Ely and Beacon are encouraged that industry perceptions of what makes good daytime TV are at last changing.

Says Ely: “Daytime was seen as a mumsy genre. We’d be pitched crafts and knitting and weddings and dating. And loads of pet shows. People would say, ‘Nine million people own a dog’, and we’d say: ‘Yes, but 61 million don’t. Daytime doesn’t mean niche.’”

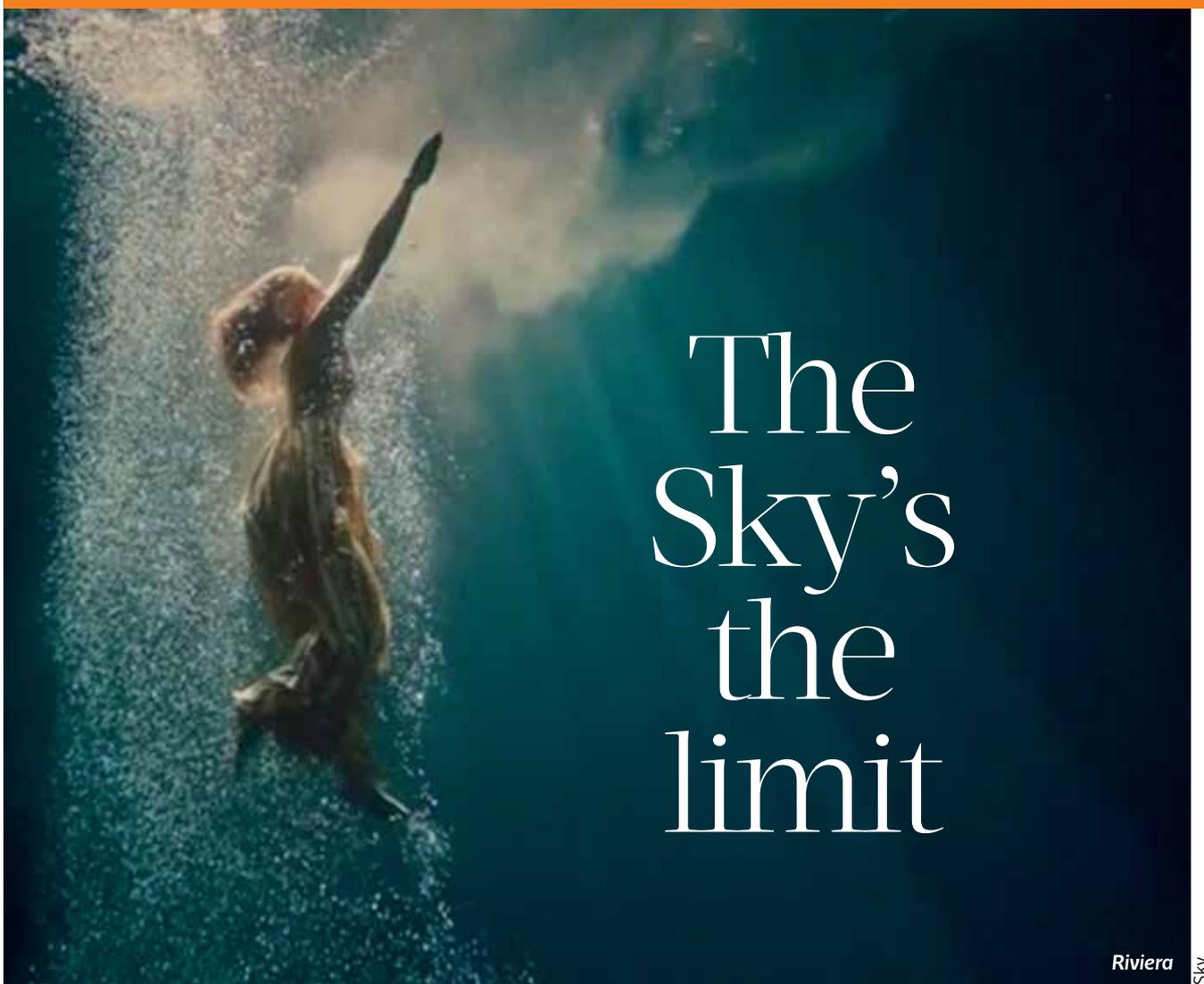
The challenge of launching new shows when the schedule is packed

‘WHILE DAYTIME AUDIENCES ARE LOYAL, THEY LIKE ROUTINE’

with big brands has also been an issue for Channel 4. However, the decision to decommission *Deal or No Deal* two years ago freed up 200 hours per year, allowing the channel to air more upmarket, repeatable features.

These are typically presenter-led, observational shows featuring ordinary people and have a clear sense of take-out for the audience. They include *A New Life in the Sun*; *Escape to the Chateau*; *DIY*; *Find It, Fix It*, *Flog It* and *Extreme Cake Makers*.

The latter two shows have won an RTS and a Broadcast award, respectively, and helped change the perception that daytime means low budget and low quality. Daytime share is up



Riviera SKY

Pay-TV

Mathew Horsman analyses the impact of Comcast's recent £30bn purchase of the European pay-TV platform

'NOW TV WAS ONE OF SEVERAL BIG ATTRACTIONS FOR COMCAST'

It's official. Sky, the leading pay-TV platform in the UK, is no longer a Murdoch company. The man most closely identified with the launch and development of the film and footie satellite giant, Rupert Murdoch, signalled his departure late last year, when his 21st Century Fox media behemoth agreed to sell most of its pay-TV and Hollywood studio assets, including a 39% stake in Sky, to Disney for \$71bn.

Fox clearly preferred the Mouse to a competing approach from US cable and broadcast combo Comcast.

But the final stages of Murdoch's full retreat would await an end game of some complexity and not a little drama. Having failed to secure the Fox assets in the US, Comcast was intent on winning the consolation prize. Fox's stake in Sky was pledged to Disney as part of the US deal but Comcast mounted its own spoiling bid for the rest of Sky, having tried and failed to derail the Disney-Fox tie up.

Disney and Comcast went to the

wire on Sky and, when the dust settled, Comcast emerged the (somewhat impoverished) winner. It stumped up a stonking £30bn for a company that had been trading at around £20bn before the bidding war erupted.

Some wondered whether Disney might, in the end, seek to disrupt the Comcast party, by sticking with its minority stake in Sky. Doubts were dispelled a few days after Comcast's winning bid was unveiled, when Disney sold its entire stake on the Comcast terms.

The result of one of the most closely fought battles in recent media-sector history is now clear: Disney gets the Fox movie studio and pay-TV channels, Fox's 30% stake in Hulu (about which more in a moment) and control of Asian pay-TV platform Star.

"New" Fox (to which Murdoch snr and son Lachlan will now turn their full attention) keeps Fox News, the local Fox broadcast channels and its local sports channels. The Murdochs, through News Corporation, also

continue to hold the family press interests and significant UK radio operations, including TalkSport and Virgin Radio.

Comcast, for its part, gets all of Sky, which operates pay-TV platforms in the UK, Ireland, Germany, Austria and Italy, as well as Now TV, Sky's over-the-top alternative to "full-fat" pay-TV, and its streaming service in Spain, launched in September 2017.

Ironically, the fates of Disney and Comcast remain closely intertwined – at least for now. Comcast is a major content distributor of Disney product in the US, and Sky plays a similarly important role for Disney in Europe.

The impetus behind Comcast's bid, and the reason it was willing to pay such an extraordinary price, is the transformative change afoot in international media and communications.

On-demand video continues to make strides at the expense of broadcast, as consumers increasingly require access to content on their own terms, not on the gift of schedulers. Meanwhile, traditional "full-fat" pay-TV is giving way to "skinny", cheaper bundles of pay services. Netflix, Amazon and the other insurgents are forcing the pace.

Comcast is a major cable TV operator in its home market, and owner of NBCUniversal, operator of one of four national TV networks in the US and a major Hollywood studio in its own right. Despite its international pay-TV channels, international news service CNBC and UK production companies (including *Downton Abbey* maker Carnival), Comcast has been overwhelmingly focused on its US domestic operations to date.

At home, its growth prospects were constrained because it was already so big in traditional markets. Securing an international foothold of the size implied by ownership of Sky was an attractive short cut to diversification, critical mass and global reach.

As it was already a major pay-TV player, Comcast understands this market profoundly. It was also attracted by Sky's IP strategy – effectively, a hedge on the internet as the means of delivering video as the role of broadcast diminishes.

At home, it may regret ending up with only a minority stake in Hulu, the on-demand TV service that will be owned 60% by Disney once it completes its acquisition of Fox (adding Fox's 30% stake to its own). AT&T, through its

recently acquired Time Warner subsidiary, holds the remaining 10%.

Hulu has been an important part of the strategy of Disney, Comcast, Fox and Time Warner in the face of intense competition from new entrants such as Amazon and Netflix. Already, the main US free-to-air networks (Disney's ABC, Comcast's NBC, Fox's eponymous network and CBS) have bulked

‘AS A MAJOR PAY-TV PLAYER, COMCAST UNDERSTANDS [SKY’S] MARKET PROFOUNDLY’

up by buying or launching pay-TV variants. In nearly every case, these networks are now owned by companies that operate studios as well.

Mainstream media's joint response to the digital new entrants, Hulu, offers both an ad-funded and a subscription video-on-demand (SVoD) variant, and it is clearly pitching for the same market as Netflix and Amazon.

Comcast may find it awkward to remain strategically invested in a proposition controlled by a principal competitor, Disney – especially when the latter is so obviously gearing up for battle in the SVoD space.

Disney has floated plans to have up to three SVoD propositions of its own in the US. The first one would be centred on a repositioned Hulu; the second would offer Disney's premium movie and TV content (the company having already signalled the removal of most of its attractive content from Netflix in the coming year); the third would be an ESPN+ service. There has been speculation that these could be bundled at an attractive price.

Comcast may turn its direct-to-consumer attention to Now TV and the European market. The Sky-owned brand is third in UK SVoD, with fewer than 2 million subscribing households, well behind Netflix (with more than 9 million) and Amazon Prime Video (around 5 million).

Now TV has been carefully positioned in the UK and elsewhere in the Sky footprint so as not to unduly accelerate declines in the company's core,

high-revenue, pay-TV business. The theory has been that, if households really do want to quit full-fat pay-TV, then Sky can nudge them toward the skinny bundle of Now TV. If someone is going to eat your lunch, it may as well be you. The same lesson is being applied, it seems, in the case of Hulu in the US.

Now TV was one of several big attractions for Comcast, alongside the sheer size of the pay-TV satellite footprint, particularly in the UK, Germany and Italy. Comcast was also impressed by Sky's advanced set-top box functionality under its new Sky Q brand and excellent customer management (better, by all accounts, than Comcast's own service, which is much-maligned on social media).

Comcast will also be able to merge its content production and distribution assets in Europe (under NBCU) with those of Sky (under its Vision subsidiary), and take full advantage of its ownership of pay-TV platforms on both sides of the Atlantic and its control of a major film studio. Given the lack of overlap between Comcast and Sky, other than in production and distribution, this is where job cuts could materialise.

Finally, Comcast appears to be keeping on board one of the UK's very best senior management teams, led by Jeremy Darroch.

There will be many companies watching Comcast-Sky with keen interest. Disney, for a start, will need to consider how closely it remains linked to Sky as a distribution partner, or whether it should plough its own direct-to-consumer furrow in Europe.

Among the UK public service broadcasters, ITV and Channel 4 are both looking to upgrade and evolve their on-demand propositions, either with or without the BBC.

They will also want to see how their plans might involve Sky and other pay-TV operators who share an interest in promoting UK broadcast and on-demand services in response to the challenge posed by Netflix and Amazon. Sky and the commercial PSBs are newly aligned in a market where once they were at daggers drawn.

It wasn't cheap. But Comcast has bought itself a stellar asset. And now, abroad as well as at home, Comcast aims to use its expensively won critical mass and operational scale to strike hard and deep at the digital warriors massing at the gates. ■

Content

Graeme Thompson salutes *The Mighty Redcar* and learns about the challenge of building relationships in difficult situations

Journey to forgotten Britain



A small town on the north-east coast of England found itself trending on social media in the wake of a landmark factual series for BBC Two. *The Mighty Redcar*, a four-part documentary made by 72 Films, won praise for its uplifting depiction of young people enduring the challenges of life in a northern town blighted by the closure of its steelworks, and for the series' distinctive 1980s soundtrack.

But more importantly for the production team, who lived in the once-thriving resort for the best part of a year, the four 45-minute episodes shown earlier this autumn received warm endorsement from locals.

Director Dan Dewsbury admits that

he and his crew faced suspicion and hostility in their first weeks. Townsfolk felt that television crews in the past had distorted life on Teesside.

"We moved in to a very functional flat in the town and basically set out to prove to everyone we were going to do this fairly," says Dewsbury, who previously worked on titles such as *The Age of Loneliness* and *The Detectives*. "It felt like we met almost everyone in Redcar, trying to win their trust.

"Our worst moment came when we lost access to institutions, including the college and the school. This was a major setback given our focus on young people. Thankfully, we were able to win them round."

The production followed a group of people in their late teens and early twenties attempting to realise their

dreams against a backdrop of high youth unemployment and rising poverty.

The stories included those of Kaitlyn Kempen, who aspires to go to Rada while her mum works three jobs to pay the rent; James Daniels, whose dad is in prison and who is mentored by Redcar's under-funded youth service into a job that just might keep him out of trouble; and Safy Diarrassouba, who has the potential to play netball for England, but is prevented from taking up a scholarship to a private school in Yorkshire by her mother who can't bear to see her leave.

"It was hard filming some of these stories," says Dewsbury, himself the product of a northern working-class upbringing. "We wanted happy endings for them all."

One of the storylines that did have



Tom Pearson, participant in *The Mighty Redcar*

BBC

an upbeat conclusion involved Dylan Cartlidge, who worked as a waiter while writing and performing his own alternative hip-hop music.

Cameras followed Dylan as he travelled to London to meet Universal Music staffers. He was later signed to Glassnote Records (home to Mumford & Sons) and is now on tour. In episode 1, he spoke of his ambition to earn enough to bring his younger brother out of care.

Dylan's musical journey, along with the heroic determination of vinyl-record store Black Slab to keep its business in Redcar, were underscored by the show's synth-laden soundtrack, which featured an eclectic mix of 1980s icons, including Tears for Fears, Aretha Franklin and Jimmy Somerville.

Critical and popular reaction to the

soundtrack resulted in one of Spotify's most popular playlists.

"The music became incredibly important to the show," says Dewsbury. "We'd done some filming at Redcar's local radio station, which was playing a lot of 1980s music. After discussing with Danny Horan [the BBC commissioner now at Channel 4] and the editor, the 1980s vibe felt absolutely right for the series."

Over 36 weeks, the team shot considerably more than they were ever able to use. Some storylines fizzled out because of access difficulties or the young protagonists simply moved on.

"Lots of the young people we met ended up joining the forces to escape the town," recalls the director, who has developed a reputation for building relationships in challenging situations.

"Redcar, like so many once-thriving communities, holds tight to its past. Older people talk about what it used to be like. That's such a downer for the younger people. What came out of this for me is that you have to think of the future and invest in this new generation and not yearn for what's lost.

"One of the most humbling things we witnessed was the way in which the youth service, business people and volunteers in Redcar went out of their way to support, mentor and encourage these guys."

During his time in the town, Dewsbury recruited additions to his team. These included a local drone operator, who captured sweeping vistas of Redcar's majestic seafront, dominated by the abandoned steelworks, and student Madison Cooper, who proved an authentic and engaging on-screen narrator.

"I always wanted a narrator from Redcar," he says. "I wanted that voice to be empowered. So we found Maddy after an open audition. It was a collaboration between director and contributor.

"She had input on the script and was very much a part of the team. Her

authenticity was one of the things that made the show distinctive."

His researcher was RTS bursary student Adam Mann. "It was his first big job since graduating from university. His local knowledge was invaluable and he brought real enthusiasm and determination to the team," he says.

'IT WILL MAKE YOU LAUGH. IT WILL BREAK YOUR HEART... I HOPE IT MAKES YOU ANGRY'

After a marathon edit back in London, which Dewsbury describes as a labour of love for editors Samuel Sananta, Sam Bergson and Reva Childs, he took the unusual step of showing the episodes to the contributors.

"I decided that, if it didn't feel like truth

for those young people, it wouldn't go in. I lost sleep over whether we had done justice to their stories. We made a few changes to the edit after listening to them. Their reaction meant everything. And when the series was broadcast I was so happy for them and the team."

The filmic approach to the series and the unflinching storylines won praise from viewers and critics alike. Chitra Ramaswamy in the *Guardian* wrote: "This is proper, heart-warming, heart-rending film-making that, for a few nostalgic hours, made me love the BBC again."

And writing in the *Times*, Redcar's initially sceptical MP, Anna Turley, said: "Please do watch *The Mighty Redcar*. It will make you laugh. It will break your heart. You will be rooting for our brilliant young people. But, most of all, I hope it makes you angry. Angry at the inequality of opportunity. Angry at the limitations that poverty brings."

The success of *The Mighty Redcar* means there are likely to be more TV profiles of communities in "left-behind" British towns.

Dewsbury, currently working on a prison series, says he's aware of discussions and he would love to be involved: "You begin to understand the pride in these places, rooted in history, desperately trying to reinvent themselves. And you understand the anger of people who just want a happy life but feel they have to move away to achieve it." ■

Noisy from Newcastle

Production

Matthew Bell hears how *Geordie Shore*, a flagship show for MTV since 2011, reflects the vibrancy of the North East

The tale of boozy, sexed-up Geordies – “I’m fit, I’m flirty and I’ve got double Fs”, as one of the cast memorably declared – has come a long way in a short time.

Geordie Shore – based on the US series *Jersey Shore* – first hit UK screens in May 2011 and has racked up 163 episodes. The MTV reality show has also sold abroad to more than 80 territories.

On the eve of its 18th series, *Geordie Shore* was put under the microscope at an RTS North East and the Border “Anatomy of a hit” event in mid-October.

Graeme Thompson, a former Chair of the centre, discussed the DNA of the show with the executives who make and commission it. The session formed part of Digital Cities North East, a festival of events for the creative industries in the region.

“*Jersey Shore* was a massive hit worldwide for MTV US,” said Craig Orr, VP of commissioning and development at MTV International. A UK version was the logical next step, but where would the show be set?

Claire Poyser, Managing Director of Lime Pictures, which makes *Geordie Shore*, revealed that the North East won out because it was felt that a Geordie cast would make for a “warmer, richer, more celebratory” show. “MTV had a couple of cast members who were from Newcastle, so we put two and two together and *Geordie Shore* was born.”

Lime’s youth-accented CV was the key to winning the commission. At the time, it included both *Hollyoaks* and a reality show about a group of affluent teenagers in Cheshire called *Living on the Edge*. “We were known for making

‘noisy’ television,” recalled Poyser, whose indie was then also gearing up to make *The Only Way Is Essex* (*Towie*).

Geordie Shore, like *Towie* and *Made in Chelsea*, is a constructed reality show that blends fact and drama. “It’s a model that has proved hugely popular,” said the show’s executive producer, Rebecca McLaughlin. “It’s really important that we listen to our cast.”

“We let our cast members tell their stories their own way and in their own time,” said Orr. “We never judge our cast members or force them to do anything they wouldn’t want to do.”

Television has a duty of care to the people in its shows. “We have processes, policies and protocols,” explained Poyser. “With *Geordie Shore*, where we have a [returning] cast, we keep in contact with that cast throughout the periods between filming. We also [use] professionals outside of Lime, [such as] psychiatrists, psychologists and medical advisers.”

The Ofcom Broadcasting Code, which applies to all shows that air in the UK, is stricter than codes operating in many other countries, said Orr: “The show that we make for the UK is the benchmark.”

The cast can and do employ agents to exploit the commercial opportunities arising from the show, such as brand endorsements. “The cast members make their money from their commercial ventures, not necessarily from the talent fees on the reality show. The exposure that we give them on TV is their shop window,” said Orr.

Cast members have also gone on to make TV spin-offs such as MTV’s *Judge Geordie*, in which Vicky Pattison settled feuds between couples, friends and families. An MTV reality series, *The*

Elletra
from
*Geordie
Shore*

Charlotte Show, features former *Geordie Shore* star Charlotte Crosby. And many of the cast have made the jump to the *Big Brother* house and *Celebrity...* jungle.

The cast are paid but Orr wouldn't be drawn on how much: "We pay more for our cast members on *Geordie Shore* than on other, similar reality shows in the UK because we're filming with them 24/7.

"They get paid decently and fairly. We've been cautious not to go wild with [their pay] because we've had situations with MTV US reality shows where the talent fees were so much that we could no longer afford to make the show."

Geordie Shore is shot in a purpose-built house on the quayside at Wallsend, where ITV cop show *Vera* is also made. "We have the house all year round. We put our cameras and rig in it," explained McLaughlin. "We have to make sure that the cameras are in the right place at the right time to be able to tell [the cast's] stories, and then be able to react to the fall-out from those stories."

Geordie Shore uses footage shot in the house, on location in Newcastle, and in front of a green screen to capture a cast member's reaction to an incident. "Newcastle, as a city, has been an absolutely fantastic location," said McLaughlin. "We don't just film in the house and clubs – we film in lots of locations across Newcastle."

"Ultimately, the success of the show comes down to the cast over the actual location, but the cast being Geordies, predominately, is key," said Orr. "*Shore* in a different town wouldn't have as much appeal."

A day's filming produces around 130 hours of footage and each episode takes two days to film. "That gets crunched down to a show and, by the time you take out things such as pre-title [sequences], you're looking at only 40 minutes of new content," said McLaughlin. Three crews, each with a producer, work in shifts to ensure filming continues day and night. "The editors have a huge task and have around seven weeks offline and one week online in which to [edit] it," she added.

Lime Pictures hires the kit and some crew for *Geordie Shore* in the North East. "For our runners, we go to local universities," said McLaughlin. "It's really important for the show because these guys have local knowledge."

Geordie Shore shares features with other shows in the Lime Pictures stable, such as *Towie*, argued Poyser. She added: "We don't make snipey television, we make warm, aspirational,

engaging television. Of course, I would say that, but we do.

"With the more successful reality shows, while [viewers] will remember moments of aggravation, most of the viewers don't want to see too much of that. Whether it's in *Geordie* or *Towie*, [viewers don't like] too much shouty, in-your-face [footage]."

Geordie Shore, Poyser suggested, owed its longevity to generating a feel of "community, a sense of family and [people] looking out for each other – there is a genuine warmth there". ■

'Anatomy of a hit: *Geordie Shore*, took place at Tyneside Cinema, Newcastle upon Tyne, on 16 October. The producer was Graeme Thompson.

Investing in the North East

Geordie Shore, ITV's *Vera* and BBC show *The Dumping Ground* are the only three returning network shows currently filmed in the North East.

"I've spent most of my 35 years in television outside London, so I know that the regions should never be seen as second-class citizens," said Lime Pictures Managing Director Claire Poyser.

She argued that programmes such as *Geordie Shore* contribute hugely to a region's economy: "For every series we make, there is over £300,000 of direct spend in the region on accommodation, locally employed people and travel.

"There is a very simple metric you use in television," Poyser said: "For every television programme made in the region, you [multiply] the spend by five. So, for every series we make, we reckon we inwardly invest £1.5m into the region."

Deducting the spend of the series made in foreign resorts (the cast has been relocated for holiday specials to places such as Magaluf), Poyser estimated that *Geordie Shore* "has, at the very minimum, [brought] £18m back into the [North East] economy".

The production team on the show is around 50- to 60-strong. "At least 10% to 20% of these people are employed locally – critically, in entry-level roles."



Billy Bright from *Geordie Shore*

All pictures: MTV

Further evidence that the BBC is striking a more strident tone as it calls for greater resources in the streaming era was provided by the corporation's director of content, Charlotte Moore, in her recent Steve Hewlett Memorial Lecture.

In a wide-ranging and, at times, feisty speech aimed primarily at policymakers and politicians, Moore argued that trusted, authentic British storytellers in the tradition of Hewlett risked being undermined unless the BBC was properly funded.

Yes, the golden age of content we were experiencing was partly due to Netflix and Amazon raising the bar, said Moore. But, despite having pockets as deep as the Mariana Trench, these companies' investment in UK production was not bridging the content gap – money spent on UK programmes by Britain's public service broadcasters was at its lowest for 20 years

In her lecture, the senior executive focused on what the BBC, uniquely, could deliver to audiences, both at home and overseas: authentic, trusted British storytelling, told by veterans, such as David Attenborough, or newer talent such as Phoebe Waller-Bridge, the adaptor of *Killing Eve*, and Nicole Taylor, the writer of *Three Girls*.

Moore said that Hewlett, presenter, producer and journalist, knew that, the harder the story, the more important it was to tell. "He understood that stories are there to entertain us, but they are also how we question the way we are, how we laugh at ourselves, and how we come to terms with difficult truths.

"I'm a storyteller..." Steve said it again in one of his later interviews. "I now realise that is really what I am about."

In today's fast-changing society, "British stories told by British voices matter more than ever before," proposed Moore. She recalled how viewers were emotionally engaged by *Blue Planet II*. The show's depiction of the endemic plastic pollution of the world's oceans had caused a sea change in public perception of the problem.

In particular, the story of a female whale's likely poisoning of her own calf, via the build-up of plastics and chemicals in her milk, was a pivotal moment in affecting viewers' attitudes to single-use plastic. After watching this sequence on *Blue Planet II*, they wanted to do something practical to reverse the situation. Moore said

The BBC

The BBC's **Charlotte Moore** explains why trusted British voices are more important than ever.

Steve Clarke reports

Champions of British storytelling

polling suggested that nearly two-thirds of people intended to make changes to their daily lives.

Drawing attention to the scale of maritime pollution was "public service broadcasting at its best", said the BBC's director of content. She drew a parallel between *Blue Planet II*'s unflinching focus on the effects of plastic in the oceans and one of Hewlett's most successful, and controversial, pieces of broadcast journalism.

His determination to expose the state of Diana, Princess of Wales's marriage in an incendiary, hour-long interview on *Panorama* (he was the programme's editor) in 1995 was another example of bold, emotional storytelling. The show was watched by 23 million people and generated international headlines. So, too, was his brave decision to tell his final story, the story of his cancer, live on air to Eddie Mair on Radio 4's *PM*.

Trusted storytellers were more vital than ever in our cynical, febrile age. She also referenced the RTS- and

Bafta-award-winning *Three Girls*, the story of the victims of the Rochdale child-abuse scandal, shown by BBC One on three consecutive nights.

"On the face of it, an extremely uncomfortable story to tell. Horrific and harrowing, it's fraught with really challenging issues – from why the girls weren't believed for so long, to why senior figures in the police, social services and the council were too afraid of being accused of racism to act. Before Nicole had written a single word, we promised to tell their story and we couldn't let them down," said Moore.

Turning to the present media landscape, she outlined how "the giants of the West Coast have driven up quality", forcing "everyone to raise the bar".

She claimed that, in doing so, "they've made the BBC's unique public service mission steadily more important to this country".

The BBC's public purpose was critical "in the age of filter bubbles and fake news", where, "increasingly, there's the sense that we're all living in



Killing Eve, adapted by Phoebe Waller-Bridge

BBC



Three Girls, written by Nicole Taylor

BBC

Female voices centre stage

Charlotte Moore: ‘Female stories must clearly be a massive part of this narrative, too. I don’t need to tell anyone here that, as a society, we’re just at the start of a very long journey to address a huge historical failing of female voices.’

‘But I do believe that we’re living through an incredibly exciting time. I can’t put it any better than Phoebe Waller-Bridge: when it comes to the need for more female-centric stories, finally, “people have woken the fuck up”.’

‘Forty-five per cent of the dramas we’ve commissioned at the BBC in the past two years are from female writers. It’s not 50:50, yet, but it’s more than double where we were in the past.’

‘There’s a whole generation of female stories, perspectives and experiences that’s coming to the surface. It’s our responsibility to make that generation heard – and help them to inspire a new generation in turn.’

‘They bring with them a promise of a society that is fairer, better, and more equal than ever before. I defy anyone who saw that viral video of the little girl waiting for the new *Doctor Who* to be unveiled, and who witnessed the expression on her face when she shouted, “The new doctor is a girl!” not to think that we’ve done something good and inspirational.’

our separate worlds”, suggested the content chief. “We’re focused on what makes us feel different or divided, forgetting what we have in common. We’re losing the ability to see things from another’s point of view or to put ourselves in their shoes.”

And, as shows such as *Bodyguard* and the latest incarnation of *Doctor Who* have proved, even in the VoD age there remained a place for appointment-to-view TV.

In addition to bringing the country together, part of the BBC’s purpose involved celebrating difference. This aspect of the corporation’s mission was evident in shows such as *The Boy with the Topknot*, *Murdered for Being Different*, *Chris Packham: Asperger’s and Me* and *Rio Ferdinand: Being Mum and Dad*.

While praising some of the BBC’s other achievements in drama, comedy, entertainment and factual, such as *Happy Valley*, *The Detectorists*, *Strictly Come Dancing* and David Olusoga’s *Black and British: A Forgotten History*, for reflecting British passions, Moore noted that

British stories were in decline across UK networks.

“Overall investment in original British content is down by £1bn since 2004,” she said. “It is no coincidence that all this has happened during a period when the BBC has come under real financial pressure.”

“Since 2010, when the licence fee was frozen, the amount we have available to spend on content has fallen by nearly a fifth. That’s meant half a billion less a year to spend on new British ideas and programmes.”

She continued: “Netflix’s current budget for programmes is \$8bn. Amazon’s is \$5bn. But their investment in new UK programmes is only around £150m a year. Less than 10% of their catalogues is made up of content produced in the UK.”

“*The Crown* may be a wonderful example of a big global player telling a British story, but it’s also a rare one. In this new, US-dominated media environment, we run the risk of seeing fewer and fewer distinctively British stories.” >

› Drawing attention to the BBC's role as an arm of British cultural soft power, she emphasised the importance of content such as *The Night Manager*, *War & Peace* and *Blue Planet II*, and of globally successful formats like *Strictly Come Dancing*. With Brexit looming, this part of the BBC's remit was hugely important.

"And it's about so much more than just the BBC..., it's about the whole of the UK production sector and the strength of our broadcasting industry overall," Moore added. "British TV is the very best in the world. As a country, we punch so far above our weight!"

The implication was clear – further resources were needed to beef up British content aimed at UK audiences, or the US would eventually dominate British media companies to an even greater extent than was the case today.

"Ten years ago, around 83% of independent production companies in the UK were either UK- or European-owned. Today, it's less than 40%, with the rest owned by US multinationals.

"Increasingly, it is decisions taken on the [American] West Coast that are defining our media landscape. We cannot allow them to reduce our creative firepower."

Creativity was taking a back seat to technology: "The television landscape is increasingly defined by what will deliver the biggest profits for companies, not the best programmes for audiences.

"I worry that the insatiable greed for data-gathering is actually serving the wrong master. That entire businesses are focused on what they can take from audiences, instead of what they can give back.

"Sure, audience data and algorithms are incredibly useful. We can learn so much from what's working for audiences and what's not. We can understand how to tailor our services uniquely to them.

"But I don't believe any amount of data can tell you what to commission next. Data simply won't deliver *Car Share*, *A Very English Scandal* or *Murder in Successville*."

She made five promises to licence-fee payers: a commitment to new talent; to back great talent; to provide the right content for younger audiences; to respect diverse audiences ("Diversity needs to be hardwired into everything we do"); and to "work

Charlotte Moore



BBC

harder than ever to take Britain's creative strength and cultural influence to the world".

Her boss, BBC Director-General Tony Hall, recently told the RTS that, following years of austerity, "the cracks are beginning to show", as witnessed by the example of BBC Three being downgraded to an online-only service.

"Because of the huge changes that have taken place in the market around us – the vast increases in competition and costs – what we currently do is simply not sustainable with the resources we have."

Despite these threats to British storytelling, there was still "a fantastic opportunity" and the BBC was "brilliantly placed to respond".

Evoking Steve Hewlett's commitment to the BBC, she said that, even though he "asked difficult questions of us, he was also our greatest champion and supporter". Hewlett "even spoke about his concerns for the BBC and its vulnerability in his very last interview with Eddie Mair. He knew how much what we do matters.

"He held us, quite rightly, to the highest standard. He was a passionate believer in British creativity and risk-taking and in public service television.

"As we look to the future, it's this spirit of fearlessness we need to embrace in everything we do." ■

BBC turns on young people

Charlotte Moore: 'We still reach more than eight out of 10 under-16s each week, and more than eight out of 10 16- to 34-year-olds. We're still the media provider that young adults spend the most time with.

'BBC Three is challenging the status quo, through an authentic and unfiltered lens...

'We know that young people love our programmes, so it's not right that they should be left to discover them on Netflix or elsewhere, and lose out on everything else the BBC has to offer.

'What we've learnt time and time again is: make it brilliant, and they will come.

'*Bodyguard* hasn't just broken all records with more than 36 million box-set requests, it also attracted the highest young audience for any drama this year on any channel.'

The Steve Hewlett Memorial Lecture is a joint initiative by the RTS and the Media Society. BBC director of content Charlotte Moore gave her lecture at the University of Westminster, central London, on 11 October.

OUR FRIEND IN BEIJING

China's television and film industry is booming. Figures released in August show that the Chinese television market has officially overtaken the UK to become the second largest in the world. And, earlier this year, China's box office overtook the US for the first time.

If you are serious about the film and television industry you need to be serious about China. It is one of the reasons that I moved to Beijing almost three years ago.

In the past few months, however, the industry has been rocked by the events surrounding one of its biggest stars, Fan Bingbing. The story holds important lessons for media executives across the world who want to work in China.

Fan is a household name in China. She is one of the few domestic actors to have achieved crossover appeal in Hollywood, appearing in *X-Men: Days of Future Past*.

In July, she went "missing". In October, she reappeared and admitted to tax evasion. She was ordered by the authorities to pay \$127m in taxes and penalties. Like most news in China, the simple story I have outlined is surrounded by conspiracy theories. These range from illicit affairs to political meddling.

Irrespective of whether you believe in the official version of events or want to dabble in conspiracies, the story holds three important lessons for anyone wanting to do business in China:

1 The Chinese public is increasingly concerned about inequality, and loves stories of the super-rich getting their comeuppance.

For a British person, when you hear about Fan's story, it is helpful to think about it in terms of the UK Uncut tax campaign. In Britain, big companies

Marcus Ryder
on what British
TV executives
can learn from
the scandal that
engulfed a Chinese
movie star



Paul Hampartsoumian

have come under fire for not paying their taxes. In China, it has been actors who have become the face of inequality and tax "cheating".

This an important insight into what Chinese audiences want to see. Last year, the breakout TV hit was *In the Name of the People*, a drama dealing with anti-corruption detectives tracking down the rich and powerful. The first episode was viewed 350 million times.

2 Industry insiders believe that Fan proves that Chinese stars get paid "too much" relative to other key roles in TV and film. In China, it is not unusual for the vast majority of a production's budget to be spent on a single star's salary. The government has recently tried to rectify this: salaries of on-screen performers are now capped at 40% of a production's total costs.

The stars' high pay has caused a lack of investment in other parts of the industry, notably screenwriters. A few years ago, the vice-president of Alibaba Pictures even suggested doing away with screenwriters altogether. He proposed that scripts be written through "crowdsourcing" ideas on internet forums. While this idea did not take off, it showed the level of respect in which screenwriters are held.

There is a growing acceptance of the low quality of Chinese screenplays but, paradoxically, there is now what the *Hollywood Reporter* has described as a "feeding frenzy" for good scripts. This is a golden opportunity for foreign scriptwriters.

3 The final lesson from Fan's case is perhaps the most important – when you work in a foreign country you need to obey the law. I know that sounds obvious but it is vital to remember. The online publication *China Film Insider* recently carried a wonderful piece, written by Dan Harris, a leading international media lawyer, about Fan Bingbing. He noted how, when it comes to Asia, foreign companies often play fast and loose with the law and taxes.

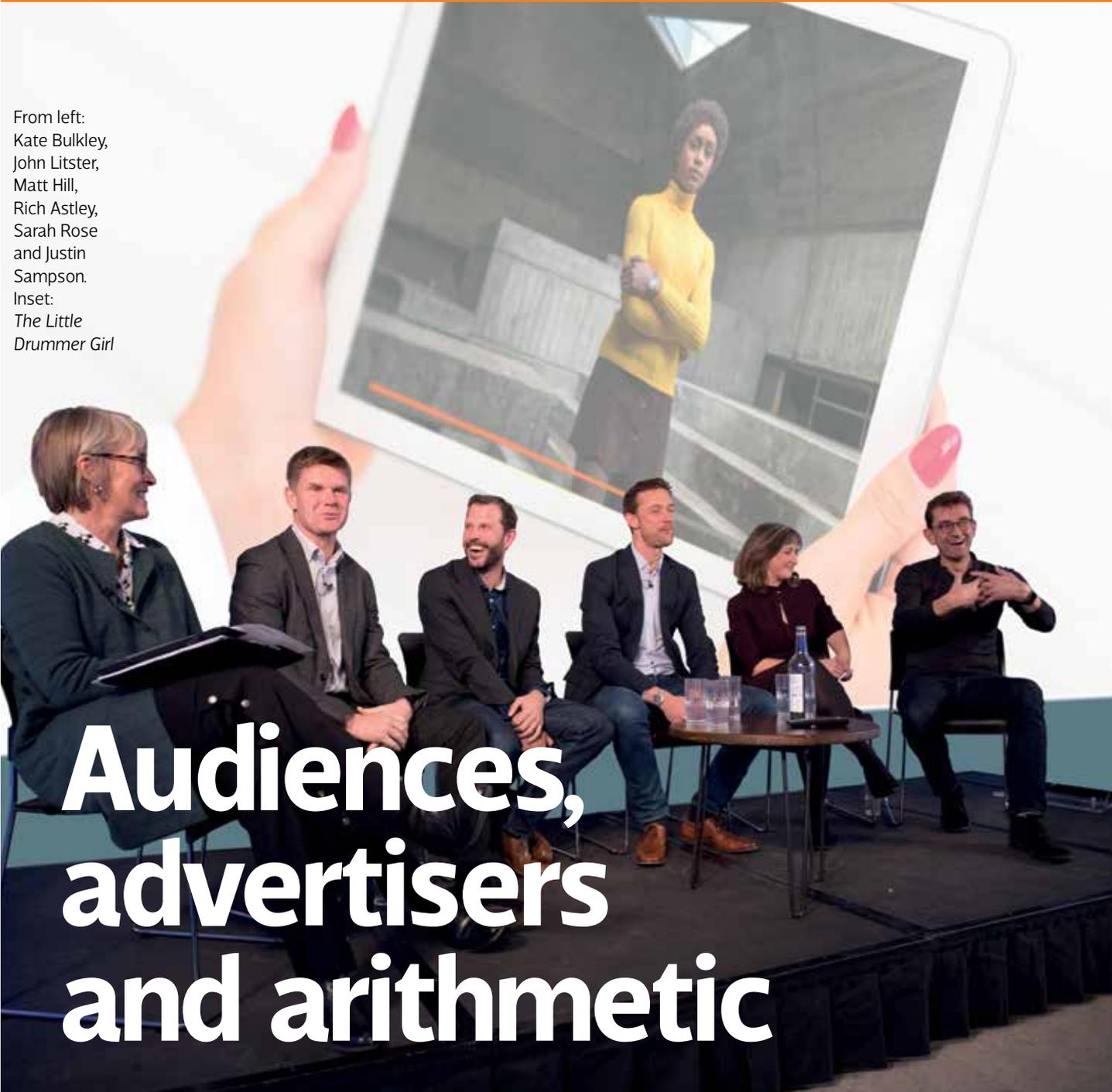
There is no denying that the legal structures in many Asian jurisdictions are "challenging", but the need for good legal advice throughout any production is essential.

It is difficult to know what the long-term consequences will be for Fan's career. Her most recent movie, *Air Strike*, co-starring Bruce Willis, was released in the US but cancelled in China.

Long term, there is almost no doubt that the industry will keep on growing in China, and international media execs will need to learn how to work in it successfully. ■

Marcus Ryder is chief international editor of CCTV News Digital, part of CGTN.

From left:
Kate Bulkley,
John Litster,
Matt Hill,
Rich Astley,
Sarah Rose
and Justin
Sampson.
Inset:
*The Little
Drummer Girl*



Audiences, advertisers and arithmetic

Television is trying to keep advertisers happy and out of the clutches of its online competitors. But, with the growth of streaming services such as Netflix, totting up who watches TV, and when and where, is becoming a complicated business.

This is the key data that advertisers want and which ratings body Barb is doing its utmost to provide, according to CEO Justin Sampson. He was part of a panel at an RTS early-evening event that drew a capacity crowd to The Hospital Club in late October.

Measurement

Matthew Bell grapples with the complexities of measuring TV viewing across a multi-device landscape

The other panellists, Sky Media Managing Director John Litster included, were encouraged by the strides Barb has been making to keep pace with modern viewing habits. “From an advertising sales perspective, Barb is and always will be our currency,” he said.

Sky also collects its own audience data from set-top boxes, which it can use to hone its targeted advertising.

Channel 4 harvests audience information from the 18 million registered users of its video-on-demand (VoD) platform, All 4, more than half of whom are in the key – for advertisers – 16-34 age group. “We get very

'WE NEED TO FIX COMMERCIAL MEASUREMENT... AND CONVINCe ADVERTISERS TO BRING BUDGET BACK TO TV'

granular information about what they're watching [and] on which devices," revealed Sarah Rose, chief consumer and strategy officer at Channel 4.

Barb, through Project Dovetail, has caught up with the broadcasters and is now releasing multiple-screen figures for TV sets, tablets, PCs and smartphones across the TV landscape (see box on page 22).

"The truisms that Dovetail has now enabled the whole market to see are ones we've known for some time, namely that most [young viewers], when they can, watch [programmes] on the big screen. Everyone imagines teenagers in the bedroom watching on smartphones and tablets – [but that number] is tiny," said Rose

She added: "We are relieved that the Dovetail numbers and the numbers we have from our own users match – they vindicate [Barb's] panel measuring system." Dovetail, she said, "is revolutionising how broadcasters operate. We commission shows differently now because we see how they're consumed on different platforms."

"Barb is in a good place," suggested Litster. "Eighteen months ago, we were struggling, as a collective, to get things moving. But I think that there's a sense of initiative now, and Dovetail actually working is something we're all excited about."

Despite the popularity of multi-platform and catch-up TV, however, old-fashioned audience measurement still has its place. "Overnight [ratings] still tell you whether you have a hit," argued Rose.

She continued: "Things that are top 10 in VoD viewing tend to be top 10 in linear, because success travels, and it's nearly always on the main channels in the same order. Without wanting to sound like a terrestrial dinosaur, TV is proving remarkably resilient. [Project] Dovetail is game-changing but, still, 90%-plus of the viewing it tracks is linear."

But not everything on the horizon is rosy from Barb's perspective. The increase in unidentified viewing – content on services that Barb is unable

to measure – offers a challenge both to the ratings body and broadcasters (see box, right).

And the amount of unidentified viewing has increased hugely in recent years with the growth of the US streaming services. Pre-Netflix, the level of unidentified viewing was far lower and mainly attributed to people using their TV sets for gaming or watching DVDs.

"There's a large amount of commercial viewing in television that is not currently captured [in the ratings]," said Rich Astley, chief product officer at Finecast. His company delivers addressable advertising across VoD, linear and live-streaming platforms. "In the minds of a lot of our marketers, TV as an advertising medium is currently under-represented."

He added: "TV is much bigger than [its] current representation from linear viewing – there's an opportunity to either bring investment back into TV or [bring in] new investment.

"There's a really strong future in television and the experience of watching TV has never been as good as it is today." But Astley warned: "As an advertising medium, it's got a lot of work to catch up on. We [need to] prescribe the right value to TV as an advertising medium for the future."

For agencies and brands looking to advertise on television, "there's a bit of frustration out there", admitted Matt Hill, research and planning director at Thinkbox, the marketing body for UK commercial TV. "The one thing that everyone is looking for is to get a proper gauge of the incremental reach across linear TV and broadcast VoD, and get an idea of [how] their campaigns are being delivered." Barb is addressing this shortfall in its data in the second stage of Project Dovetail.

TV executives worry that advertising revenue is increasingly being lost to social media and online platforms, but Hill offered some reassurance. "TV does a job that those other channels cannot do," he said, emphasising the "premium content" that television offers.

Barb's new, multiple-screen ratings, said Astley, were hugely useful. For >

Barb's Project Dovetail

The television ratings body, Barb, maintains a panel of 5,300 homes that reflect TV viewing across the country, to produce audience figures daily.

In September, it launched multiple-screen programme ratings that measure audiences on TV sets, tablets, PCs and smartphones. These figures are generated by a software code embedded in broadcasters' video-on-demand (VoD) services across the different online platforms. A process called 'Dovetail Fusion' combines the panel's viewing data and the device-based information to produce multiple-screen programme audience figures.

This new measurement is a key part of Barb's Project Dovetail, which launched in 2013 in recognition of changing UK viewing habits.

In the next stage of the project, concerned with multiple-screen reach and time spent viewing, it will report the extent to which tablets and PCs increase the number of viewers and average weekly viewing time for Barb-reported channels. Finally, the ratings body plans to report on multiple-screen advertising campaign performance.

'We have to take a whole industry along with us, with a measurement that everybody believes to be right,' said Barb CEO Justin Sampson. 'In an ideal world, I'd have the broadcasters drilled like a troop of the North Korean army in Pyongyang, synchronised and moving at speed, but that's not going to happen.'

'We have to avoid the trap that the Spanish Armada fell into, which was to sail at the speed of the slowest ship – and it didn't do very well. So, we're trying to find a pace that is somewhere between those two.'

The modern TV audience

Barb CEO Justin Sampson used the audience for hit BBC One thriller *Killing Eve* to illustrate how TV viewing habits have changed. The entire series was made available to viewers on iPlayer following the transmission of episode 1 on 15 September.

He revealed that 3.87 million people watched episode 4 before it was broadcast, 2.26 million saw it live on 6 October and 2.48 million watched it during the following week. The total audience was 8.6 million, of whom 90% watched on TV sets, the remainder on other devices.

Live events, such as England's World Cup semi-final against Croatia, are watched overwhelmingly on TV sets. It drew a television audience of 20.7 million and only 337,000 viewers on tablets, PCs and smartphones.

Another summer programme, ITV2 reality show *Love Island*, however, made a bigger splash in the online and mobile world. Using the 15 July episode as an example, Sampson said: 'The average audience on tablets, PCs and smartphones was not far off 1 million, which boosted the TV-set audience by close to 25%.'

Gaps in the measurement of TV viewing remain. 'The rise of unidentified viewing is a big challenge for Barb,' he admitted. This year, on average, viewers have spent an average 47 minutes a day watching content on services that Barb is currently unable to measure. For young adults, who are less wedded to traditional TV, the figure rises to 69 minutes a day.

'We know the TV set is on, but what's being watched is not a Barb-reported channel,' said Sampson. Unidentified viewing is growing and largely driven by audiences for Netflix, YouTube and Amazon services.

New measurement tools could help Barb to measure audiences for the new, over-the-top channels. Router meters, attached to a home wi-fi network, would allow the ratings body to monitor the viewing of streaming services.



Sarah Rose

'DOVETAIL IS REVOLUTIONISING HOW BROADCASTERS OPERATE. WE COMMISSION SHOWS DIFFERENTLY NOW'

Paul Hampartsournian

› *Killing Eve* (see box, left), they "are telling us that there is a huge amount of multi-platform, pre- and post-broadcast viewing".

But only up to a point. "The critical piece that's missing is commercial measurement – that is, whether an ad viewed in that content is [what] is ultimately going to determine budget allocation for an advertiser. We can't do that today [for non-linear TV]," he said.

Astley added: "[Advertisers] are pulling money out [of TV] – that's been happening for the past few years. What do we need to do to fix that? We need to fix commercial measurement. We've got to address some of the changes in viewing consumption that we're seeing and convince advertisers to bring budget back to TV."

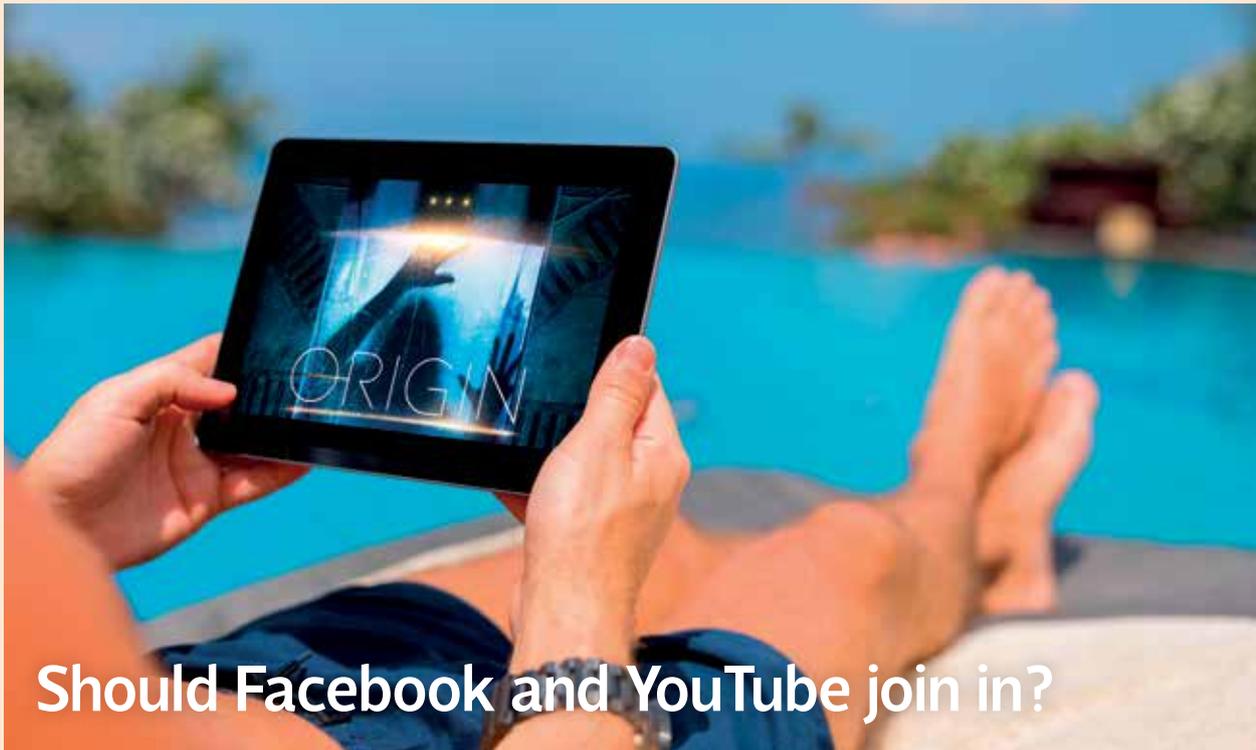
Nevertheless, there were plenty of reasons to be cheerful about television's future relationship with advertising. "I still believe in the brand-building power of TV," said Litster. "Commercial TV, and TV generally, has had a really successful time

of it this year in terms of delivering big audiences."

The Sky Media chief added that targeted advertising is coming on apace: "We've had loads of success with things like local car dealers and garden centres, which can advertise at a postcode level. A car dealer can advertise within four miles of its dealership, supporting big-brand advertising for particular models. We need to do more of that."

"It's a really exciting time," concluded Thinkbox's Matt Hill. "The premium environment that TV offers, coming together with all the benefits that you get from the online world and measurement, is a crucial part of that. I think we're heading towards a really good place." ■

The early-evening event 'Who is watching? The challenge of digital TV measurement' was held at The Hospital Club in central London on 24 October. The event was chaired by journalist Kate Bulkley and produced by Terry Marsh and Vicky Fairclough.



Shutterstock/YouTube

Should Facebook and YouTube join in?

Barb does not collect viewer data from the US tech giants but, as Facebook and Google (via its subsidiary YouTube) produce more TV-quality programming, this omission feels increasingly significant, not least to advertisers. However, there is little agreement in the TV industry on how to measure such audiences.

At the RTS event, Barb CEO Justin Sampson issued an invitation: 'Anyone who wants to meet and work with Barb – we're happy to talk to them.'

From the audience, Google UK's head of market insights, Jonny Protheroe, responded. 'There is a will [at] Google for YouTube to be part of TV [joint industry] currencies around the world,' he said, adding that discussions were most advanced in Germany where YouTube should soon be measured by the German equivalent of Barb. Joint industry currencies (JICs) provide audience numbers and trading metrics for each advertising medium.

'We need to agree as an industry what we want the currency to cover. I don't think you can treat all platforms the same. They are different in the way people consume [content] and they are different in the type of data available, and measurement needs to reflect those differences.'

He warned that the 'one-size-fits-all existing measurement structure' was unsuitable. '[We need to be] represented appropriately and fairly.'

Finecast's Rich Astley responded: 'It's great to hear – we've heard the appetite's there. The demand is very much there [too] from advertisers and agencies to have everything in one view and in one measurement system, but the differences do need to be called out.'

'Is it professionally produced, long-form content or is it short-form, user-generated content? YouTube has some of both. Let's have everything in the system, but clearly label it when it's different.'

Facebook head of marketing science R&D for EMEA Alex North, who was also in the audience, said: 'There's definitely an interest on the Facebook side in adhering to the principles that Justin outlined in terms of audited, transparent, independently measured data. There's a danger, though, of terminology here.'

He argued that YouTube is 'TV-like; Facebook is even less TV-like, so should it sit within Barb?' He added: 'It's not as simple as, "Flick a switch and you're in Barb."'

Thinkbox's Matt Hill agreed with North: '[Just] because we've got lots of video formats springing up across different places, [it doesn't mean] that they all need to be measured together in the same place, when, in fact, they're really quite different types of video.'

Hill added: 'The reality is that Barb is a measurement for premium, professionally produced, quality content in a quality environment and that should continue to be its remit.'

The panel chair, journalist Kate Bulkley, pointed out that Facebook is now producing more high-quality content, a view that Hill accepted. 'If it is making professionally produced content on [VoD services] Facebook Watch and YouTube Red [now YouTube Premium], that is more legitimate because it's quality content offering a similar ad-like experience to the rest of TV,' he said. 'But the rest of the services don't, so therefore it shouldn't really be considered on a like-for-like basis.'

'Where do you draw the line in terms of quality, professional, premium-quality content? It is a subjective measure. If you are an advertiser, you want to know where the valuable placements are that you can go.'

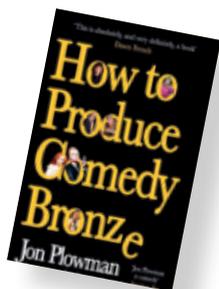
'There's a danger that we get caught up in definitions – and what you decide is a premium environment, I might disagree with. How do we come together as an industry to decide these kinds of things?'

Astley suggested, provocatively: 'You can start with Ofcom-regulated [services.]' Currently, Facebook and Google – which argue that they are platforms, not publishers – are not regulated by Ofcom and therefore not subject to the same rules as UK broadcasters.

North replied: 'So you think we should seek regulation?'

That, said Bulkley, as she ended the conversation, was 'a whole different panel discussion'.

How to Produce Comedy Bronze by Jon Plowman is published by 535, priced £16.99. ISBN: 978-1788700399



A guide to comedy gold

Book review

Lucy Lumsden revels in Jon Plowman's new book, an engaging mix of memoir and manual

How to Produce Comedy Bronze is a glorious blend of memoir and manual. It looks back on Jon Plowman's 30-year career as a freelance producer and BBC Comedy impresario, and speaks to the next generation of aspiring TV producers with various learnings accumulated along the way.

You don't need to be in the business to enjoy this book, but it's one for the comedy fan. There are insights into the making of *Alas Smith and Jones*, *A Bit of Fry and Laurie*, anything by Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders, *Bottom*, *The League of Gentlemen*, *The Office*, *Little Britain* and *WIA*.

Jon's story is busy, to say the least. It spans from his roots in theatre at Oxford University, where his contemporary Mel Smith outshone his three-man, one-act play *Oldenburg* with an all-singing all-dancing production of *Marat/Sade*, to briefly working as a TV reporter for Granada, before he realised that he was no David Dimbleby, right through to Comic Relief, Dawn and Jennifer's multiple series and, more recently, *Absolutely Fabulous: The Movie*.

His account is also snappy, informative and full of indiscretions. And, somehow, he gets away with these. This is no mean feat, given that he's still very much in the business and needs to stay friends with people in high places.

"My television career began with a lie," begins one chapter. Jon was driven by the need to avoid a desk job by any



Absolutely Fabulous: The Movie

'KNOW YOUR LIMITS EVEN WHEN YOU'RE WAY BEYOND THEM'

means necessary. He went from casting assistant in the late 1970s on *Abso-lution*, a movie starring Richard Burton, to teaching Iranian girls how to speak English so that they could get work on the make-up counters at Harrods. On his way up, he produced a late-night show with the medium Doris Stokes.

So, it's not the silver-spoon start in comedy that you might have assumed. No making cups of tea for Spike Milligan or brown-nosing the Cambridge Footlights, but a winding path, chiefly through entertainment. This led him to working with Russell Harty and then Terry Wogan on their talk shows.

The only brown-nosing was with celebrities to try and persuade them to appear on an "ulcer-inducing" live show, week in and week out. And that experience got Jon his first gig in comedy, producing *Comic Relief*.

The second half of the book treads some familiar territory, as he describes his time as head of comedy entertainment at the BBC. There, he had to deal with me on a daily basis. I was the controller of comedy commissioning, sitting with the channel heads up on the 6th floor of Television Centre. It was a role created as the centre of gravity shifted at the BBC in response to the growth of the indie sector.

This was the early noughties, the era of *Little Britain*, *The League of Gentlemen*, *Extras*, *Jam and Jerusalem*, *Hyperdrive* and *The Thick of It*, to name but a few.

Jon describes how he was something of a reluctant head of department, hardwired to be on the side of writers and talent. And, as Dawn French says in her foreword, "a brilliant Cerberus".

So, I would often have to play the role of "dream crusher" and go down to the 4th floor with the latest bit of news about what we might be able – or, rather, not be able – to afford.

"If you don't commission this, we might as well all give up and make *Countryfile*", was one of Jon's familiar complaints as his cries echoed round

the corridors of Television Centre. Don't feel too sorry for him, though, he was better than most at getting a "yes" from a commissioner. Those persuasive tactics he used to get guests for Harty and Wogan stood him in good stead, and the wrath of Jon was very effective.

There's a great chapter on his time spent in the US, immersed in the writing rooms, watching US showrunning in action. This, by the sound of it, made him even more appreciative of our British craft of comedy production.

Throughout, there are many little-known facts about shows we all love. We learn that *The Vicar of Dibley* wasn't originally written for Dawn French, that *The Archers'* Ambridge was the inspiration for Royston Vasey, and that, for *The Office*, Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant wanted to cast people who looked right, rather than people who could act.

Buy the book for the explanation of an executive producer's role on *Little Britain* alone. There, Jon had to make a call on just how big a certain bodily fluid stain on Anthony Head's jacket needed to be in order to get the biggest laugh.

For fans of *WIA*, Jon describes how his legendary moans about the BBC systems were put to good use as he became a self-appointed researcher for writer and director John Morton. He would forward the latest corporate babble, including PowerPoint presentations about the alleged benefits of toilet-roll dispensers.

And how an intern who had been working at the BBC without pay for 15 months (he was the producer's cousin, of course) would become the inspiration for the intern character Will Humphries, brought to life by the brilliant Hugh Skinner.

Jon writes exactly as he speaks. He's self-deprecating (it's there in the title), he's a great storyteller and gives the occasional side-swipe.

The book is made up of joyously short chapters which make it all

bounce along, accompanied by orders to "Google it!" or "Look it up on YouTube!", which I dutifully did.

Anecdotes from Jon's career are peppered with lessons and top tips that randomly pop up like quickies in a sketch show: "Know your limits even when you're way beyond them" or "Be careful what you agree to... exercise the same care that you would when offering a locust just the tiniest nibble from a lettuce leaf".

And there are some touching mentions of the late Geoffrey Perkins, another highly talented head of comedy, and actor Emma Chambers, two names dear to Jon and the world of comedy who left us far too early.

But, of all the many shows and people mentioned, a good chunk of the book is a rather touching love letter to Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders.

He returns to them again and again, just as, over the years, they returned to him as their go-to producer. *The Vicar of Dibley*, and Jon's description of its production (delightfully noted as a "happy spell") is a masterclass on the crucial elements of great sitcom: a simple premise, great timing, synchronicity of writer, producer and director, and a perfect cast.

Then there's *Absolutely Fabulous* – a tiny sketch developed, expanded and Joanna Lumley'd into an award-winning global phenomenon and a hit movie. No bronze here, only gold.

In *How to Produce Comedy Bronze*, we have a rare insight into the peculiar and precious art of comedy, and a memoir from someone who has been at the epicentre of some of our greatest comedies in recent years.

Jon is a fun-seeker, mischief-maker, stress-coper and the ultimate reluctant professional who, thankfully, never grew up. We salute him and look forward to the next instalment. ■

Lucy Lumsden runs Yellow Door Productions.

Beguiled by his own image?

Book review

Jon Thoday finds much to enjoy in Michael Ovitz's autobiography but ultimately thinks the agent's enigma remains intact

Who is Michael Ovitz? An interesting title for an autobiography of probably

the greatest living agent. Ultimately, though, this book fails to deliver a definitive answer to the question.

For newcomers to Hollywood memoirs of this ilk, there is plenty to enjoy. Chapters are packed with a plethora of anecdotes about battles won, films made, deals struck and (occasionally) flops sold.

For the uninitiated, there is less than one might expect to learn about the inner workings of Hollywood and the world of show business more generally, or about how they have changed over the years. For many, however, this may not be the fundamental draw.

Personal accounts of the headline events of Ovitz's career, including John Belushi's death, and, of course a range of his greatest hits – from *Ghostbusters*, *Jurassic Park* and *Groundhog Day* to *Rain Man*, *Goodfellas* and *Tootsie*, to name a few – are, expectedly, entertaining.

Having said that, for me, Ovitz often creates an itch only to leave it unscratched. He raises subjects that sound interesting but are then never especially well explored – that Robert Redford was difficult; that David Geffen hated him; and the demise of his relationships with his partners, who included his closest friend, Ron Meyer.

In particular, the lack of any significant engagement with his own failures is frustrating. Much time is spent explaining how he signed mega stars away from rival agencies, and then

Who Is Michael Ovitz? by Michael Ovitz is published by WH Allen, priced £20. ISBN: 978-0753553367



handed those stars to his junior partners. But there is no mention of projects he had promised to set up floundering and falling by the wayside.

It would be great if he told us about the five films he really believed in that never got made. Or even a single project he loved that failed with CAA (Creative Artists Agency, which he co-founded), but which went on to succeed with the involvement of another agency.

Maybe there are no such examples. Or maybe, as a great salesman, he just can't bring himself to divulge what really happened when things didn't go to plan.

There is a nagging fear that Ovitz has considered which failures his autobiography simply has to include because they were so public and newsworthy, and omitted the rest. For all the

recollections of "what was", where are the tales of "what might have been"?

If you are an enthusiast of "the business of show business" books, this one does not come close to either *The Last Mogul*, about Lew Wasserman and MCA Universal, or *The Agency*, devoted to the creation and rise of the William Morris agency – albeit, neither of these are autobiographies.

These two works charter the foundations of modern American show business, without which Ovitz could not have succeeded. I had hoped that *Who is Michael Ovitz?* would provide an interesting sequel, a study of how CAA continued the industry's evolution.

Wasserman is discussed as an adversary of Ovitz, who hardly spoke to him. The key detail of *why* is omitted. Maybe Ovitz doesn't know or maybe he doesn't want to say.

As for the key points of difference between William Morris and CAA, Ovitz's explanation rests heavily on his statements that the founders of CAA were simply much hungrier and harder working. He leaves out any detail about what they actually did differently.

There is an absence of any real analysis of how show business changed with the rise of CAA. Perhaps this is best explained by a simple fact: it didn't. Not in any meaningful sense, anyway, because the real trailblazers were the previous generation. It might be that *The Last Mogul* and *The Agency* are more interesting reads on this subject because they are about a more interesting period in Hollywood history.

That is not to dispute Ovitz's own personal status as a groundbreaker in some areas. A section in which he

'OVITZ OFTEN
CREATES AN
ITCH ONLY
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‘THERE IS AN ABSENCE OF ANY REAL ANALYSIS OF HOW SHOW BUSINESS CHANGED WITH THE RISE OF CAA’



Michael Ovitz in front of Roy Lichtenstein's Bauhaus Staircase mural, which dominates the lobby of the old CAA building

PatrickMcMullan.com

explains how he took CAA into the world of corporate finance, and managed to persuade Sony's head office in Japan that he was best placed to advise on the acquisition of a Hollywood studio, is fascinating.

So, too, is his account of how he shook Madison Avenue when he infiltrated the inner workings of Coca-Cola and persuaded the company that CAA, a showbiz agency, could create better advertisements than advertising giant McCann Erickson.

Such was his brilliance in these instances that it comes as a surprise to discover that he struggled to navigate

the pitfalls of a different corporate environment when he left CAA in 1995 to work as number two to Michael Eisner at Disney.

The obvious conclusion here is that Ovitz's success at CAA was intimately connected with the team he worked with and the incredible talent he represented – and that, ultimately, the talent is the power. Without it, Ovitz became a mere mortal. He proved the truth of the advice that good agents give to their clients – never believe your own hype. It is a shame that he doesn't offer more reflections on this topic.

If an autobiography's fundamental

mission is to deliver genuine insight into the character of its subject, *Who Is Michael Ovitz?*, while engaging and enjoyable, ultimately disappoints.

You can infer that he was (and is) a great salesman, who gravitated not to the most exciting projects but to the biggest deals – but any indication of what drives him is noticeably absent.

There is plenty written on how he established a new high for movie directors' fees and managed to package movies with 30% of the spend on talent coming back to CAA.

We read about his apparent reincarnation with his recent pursuits in Silicon Valley, which he seems to regard as the new Hollywood. But at no point does he really say he liked what he was doing, which, given the incredible array of movies, TV shows and individuals on his CV, perhaps reveals more about him than anything written in the book.

More time is devoted to how he persuaded Roy Lichtenstein to paint a brilliant mural in the old CAA building at the end of Wilshire Boulevard than any passion for the projects he worked on or the artists he worked with.

Fundamentally, this is a book of, admittedly often entertaining, anecdotes about Ovitz's career with only passing nods to things that went badly. There is less that deepens our understanding of the business in which he operated or challenges our expectations of his personality.

Who is Michael Ovitz? I'm still not sure. ■

Jon Thoday is Managing Director of Avalon Entertainment.

Some feminists might choke at the idea that the highly controversial Barbie doll was actually invented by an ardent feminist. This was one of many fascinating insights to emerge from an RTS event devoted to a new feature-length documentary *Tiny Shoulders: Rethinking Barbie*.

The film examines the changing face of Barbie from a feminist – and occasionally anthropological – perspective since the doll’s debut in 1959.

This sophisticated, thoughtful and insightful 90-minute documentary premiered to strong reviews at the Tribeca Film Festival earlier this year before making its debut on the US streaming service Hulu in April. *Variety* praised the film as “illuminating and thought-provoking”.

Contributors to *Tiny Shoulders: Rethinking Barbie*, distributed by Entertainment One, include American feminists Gloria Steinem, Roxane Gay and Peggy Orenstein (the author of *Don’t Call Me Princess*).

The story of Barbie began in the second half of the 1950s, when Ruth Handler, whose husband Elliot had founded Mattel Toys in 1945, found the inspiration for what became Barbie (unusually, a doll with breasts) in a cheap German sex toy called Lilli, bought by men at tobacconists.

Over the decades, many different types of Barbie dolls and Barbie fashions have been sold. These include a Barbie presidential candidate (the party was undefined) and a Barbie astronaut but, much to the consternation of feminists, the toy’s defining characteristics – blue-eyes, impossibly skinny and blonde – remained steadfastly unchanged.

Critics of Barbie complained that the doll’s body was so thin that she lacked the body fat to menstruate. There were occasional modifications, such as to her skin tone and eyes – famously, the latter were altered so they looked straight ahead, rather than downwards.

However, it was not until 2016 that radical change took place and the “Curvy”, “Petite” and “Tall” Barbie dolls first appeared on the shelves.

The development of these new designs, collectively known as Project Dawn, and Mattel’s anxiety about the



Documentary

Oscar-nominated documentary-maker **Andrea Nevins** reveals the hidden dramas behind an international icon. **Steve Clarke** is hooked

Rethinking Barbie

launch – particularly in the PR department – provides *Rethinking Barbie* with its storyline.

As the RTS audience heard, filmmaker Andrea Nevins struck lucky when she managed to persuade Mattel to allow her inside its El Segundo HQ in Los Angeles county and observe the mainly female team at work.

“It was a complete surprise [when I found out about Project Dawn],” she said. “They didn’t know they were going to succeed. They were allowing me in to watch them potentially fail.”

How, then, did she persuade Mattel to give her this privileged access? Her previous work has focused on subjects such as Hillary Clinton and Jesse Jackson (made for A&E), and she directed HBO’s *State of Play: Happiness*, which looked at how successful NFL players cope with everyday life once they retire.

“It took Mattel a long time to convince the team to tell this story because they never let anybody inside those doors,” she recalled. “Honestly, going inside the Barbie vault – there are people working at Barbie who have never been inside.

“And, as I was investigating and observing, I saw a lot of women running a huge corporation and making some very serious decisions about what it means to be a woman in today’s society.

“I thought that was an extraordinary thing to be able to observe. And it would say something about where our society is today.”

Brought up by a mother who was a specialist in art history and her surgeon husband, Nevins attended Harvard before embarking on her media career. Her first job was working as a sports reporter in North Carolina.

“I was not a Barbie girl,” she said. “I had one but she was part of a large ecosystem of many, many toys. So, my starting point was: ‘Why do people have such incredibly strong feelings about this piece of plastic?’ Why is it that you can talk to almost anyone and they’ll tell you their Barbie story, or about how much they hate her or how much she’s influenced them or shaped their careers. My big question was why?”

Nevins added: “For me, growing up as the daughter of a feminist, and as a feminist myself, I had complicated feelings about why I also liked pretty dresses. Was that OK? I also had

complicated relationships with the men I was working with and some #MeToo moments myself.

“I thought there should be more investigation into where women are in the world. But I didn’t want it to be a dry rendition of the past 60 years of feminism. What better way than to

WHY DO PEOPLE HAVE SUCH INCREDIBLY STRONG FEELINGS ABOUT THIS PIECE OF PLASTIC?

look at an icon that we all know, which we all love and which we have all played with.”

Nevins said that she had complete editorial control over *Rethinking Barbie*, and acknowledged her lucky timing in approaching Mattel. “I went and knocked on the door and they were at a very, very dark moment. So dark that, when they saw this movie two or three years after I’d started it, they were like, ‘You never said that we were in a bad place.’

“I think that they were in this place where they really felt that they needed to let outside light in. There was a disconnect between what they felt they were saying and how the rest of the world perceived them.”

Joining her at the RTS event was Kim Culmore, the Barbie designer responsible for the doll’s new iterations. She is a key presence in the film, as is her colleague, communications chief Michelle Chidoni. We witness the creative tensions between the two.

Culmore told the RTS that the experience of Project Dawn was “an important story for [all people] who run businesses”. She emphasised that “diversity and inclusion aren’t just the right things to do for humanity, they also equal good business. Corporations have a key role in changing our world.”

She added: “I signed up to be a designer, not a documentary subject. It’s uncomfortable and you are very vulnerable. I can’t speak for the company on why they chose to do it.

“I know how important it was to us as a Barbie team.... Many people still don’t know that we’ve made these changes. Many people still don’t know the foundational origin of the brand came from an extraordinary feminist perspective.

“Ruth [Handler] was a business-woman who couldn’t sign cheques at her own company.

“We stand on that very feminist foundation and do our best to leave the brand better than it was when we stepped into our roles.”

Even in these times, when content production is booming, finding the money for high-end documentary can be a struggle. Fortunately, Nevins had money in the bank from her two previous films. “We self-financed,” she said. “Subsequently, Hulu came on board as a partner. By then, we were in the edit, so they knew what the end of the story was.

“What they didn’t know was that Trump was going to be elected, that we were going to have a pussy-grabbing moment and a #MeToo moment.”

So, in the wake of what turned out to be a successful relaunch, where does Barbie stand in the age of #MeToo? In our fast-moving culture, how does Barbie keep up?

“It gives you a lot to work with,” said Culmore. “Obviously, I can’t talk about what’s next for Barbie. I can talk about what we’ve done, which is instilling the bodies across the line, not just the Fashionista Dolls.

“We do close to 500 or so dolls a year. The Fashionista line is a very tiny part of that – although, financially, one of our biggest.

“We’ve introduced role-model dolls.... We are committed to maintaining our position as the most diverse and inclusive doll line in the world.

“[We want] young girls to have the opportunity to tell their stories with a broader range of characters and images. The images that we put into the hands of children matter.”

No one could disagree with that, not even Barbie’s harshest critics. ■

‘On Tiny Shoulders: Rethinking Barbie’ was screened by the RTS at the Soho Curzon cinema in London on 7 November. Andrea Nevins and Kim Culmore were interviewed by Caroline Frost.

Trans drama spreads its wings

North West Centre The first episode of timely new ITV drama *Butterfly*, written by RTS award-winner

Tony Marchant and made by the Manchester-based Red Production Company, was given a screening by RTS North West at the Lowry, Salford, in early October.

The three-part drama, which is full of warmth and humour, tells the story of an ordinary family faced with an extraordinary situation. Eleven-year-old Max identifies as a girl, and, as the ticking clock of puberty begins and Max's belief that he's in the wrong body intensifies, the fractured family – mum, played by Anna Friel, and dad, Emmett J Scanlan – must unite to help Max find a way forward.

During the Q&A which followed the screening, BBC Radio 5 Live's Nihal Arthana-yake asked the key creatives about *Butterfly's* topicality and the responsibility of creating a drama around a sensitive issue that has never before been fully explored in a UK television drama.

"There is so much



Butterfly

ITV

misinformation around, and so many families who have never seen their stories on screen," said executive producer Nicola Shindler.

Having established that it was the right time to tell the story, Shindler took the project to ITV, since it was the broadcaster's flagship soap, *Coronation Street*, that

introduced UK TV's first ever trans character, Hayley Cropper, more than 20 years ago.

Marchant said everyone involved was "really assiduous about the research", working closely with the charity Mermaids, and meeting trans people "to do justice to the experience of the kids and their families".

For its part, Mermaids was keen to be involved. Chief Executive Susie Green argued that, unlike documentaries, "this was a way of getting the story told without putting any of the young people in a position of having to out themselves or put themselves at risk".

Marchant hoped that locating the drama in the heart of a family would make it both universal and relatable, so the audience would invest in the story on three levels, "in Max's gender dysphoria, in how the family copes, and in the love story between the mum and dad".

At the heart of the story are the two young actors playing Max (Callum Booth-Ford) and sister Lily (Millie Gibson). Director Anthony Byrne praised their performances. He recounted how he worked with them, Friel, Scanlan, and Alison Steadman as outspoken grandma Barbara, helping them to gel as a family so that they'd "feel like a real family, which is so important in terms of accessibility".

Carole Solazzo

Pilgrim Award for Terry Marsh

RTS London stalwart Terry Marsh is the latest recipient of the prestigious Pilgrim Award. "It's given for outstanding service to the Royal Television Society by its hard-working volunteers," said RTS Honorary Secretary David Lowen, who presented the award to Marsh.

He quoted her colleagues' words of praise for Marsh: "Energy, commitment, dynamism, generosity, mentor, remarkable, selfless, charisma and inspiration".

She began her TV career at the BBC on *Play School*, before becoming a producer of science and technology programmes for the corporation.

In 1990, she became the youngest head of BBC schools broadcasting. Latterly, she has worked as a digital media consultant.

Marsh is a Fellow of the RTS and a former London Centre Chair. She is still involved with the centre, producing many of its events and also chairs the RTS Young Technologist

Award jury. Lowen presented the award at the Institution of Engineering and Technology in central London, which was hosting a joint event with RTS London on the 2018 International Broadcasting Convention (see page 36). Marsh handles the Society liaison with IBC. ■

Matthew Bell

The team behind Arctic sci-fi thriller *Fortitude* came to Bristol in late October to share their experiences of producing drama for Sky Atlantic.

Twenty-four local writers attended a writer's workshop with: *Fortitude* creator/writer Simon Donald; executive producer and managing director of Fifty Fathoms Patrick Spence; and script producer Ben Stoll.

After discussing how the project moved from idea to script to screen, the execs each hosted a round table with the writers to provide insights and career advice.

The same evening, a packed audience at the Watershed enjoyed a preview of the first episode from *Fortitude* series 3.

Bottle Yard Studios site director Fiona Francombe introduced the event, adding: "It was an honour for Bottle Yard to be *Fortitude's* official home for this new series and we feel sure that it sends out the message – Bristol, Unesco city of film, is the ideal place to make great drama."

Donald and Spence joined Francombe on stage to discuss the making of *Fortitude*. The idea was originally for a film, Donald said: "I kept having this discussion about monsters and horror movies and we realised it would be gold dust if you created an interesting new monster that you could spring on the public."

He added: "It was the fastest green light for any project I've been involved in, because it was what Sky Atlantic was looking for at that time – visually it stands out and it was a big character show."

Spence elaborated on how the show played with genre: "Everyone thought it was a murder mystery set in the Arctic but, halfway through series 1, it becomes a horror



Sky Atlantic

Studying with Fortitude

show." High-profile casting helped. "Michael Gambon happened to be the first one to say yes, then the rest followed," said Spence. Other cast members have included Richard Dormer and Christopher Eccleston.

On creating a captivating story, Spence advised: "Have a very clear tone of voice and have something to say [but, finally,] it's all about the characters."

Donald added: "I look for things I haven't seen before. I think this show is distinctive, as the audience are never quite sure where the answers lie."

The third series of *Fortitude* will be the last. "We're tying up all the loose ends," said Donald.

Spence elaborated: "We needed to bring all those strands to an enormous climax. There are 1.8 million Sky Atlantic fans who have watched the show."

Before the screening, the audience was shown a short film made on set by Boomsatsuma Media Production Diploma students, to whom Fifty Fathoms had provided access during production at Bottle Yard Studios.

Bristol-based Boomsatsuma offers training in the

creative arts to schoolchildren and young people.

Fortitude unit publicist Iain McCallum, who helped to pull the RTS West of England event together, said: "At Fifty Fathoms we pride ourselves on working closely with the talent we find on our doorstep, wherever we happen to be filming.

"There is no shortage of amazing talent in Bristol and it was a huge pleasure to welcome the young people from Boomsatsuma to our set and still more marvellous to see the fruits of their labour on the big screen."

Suzy Lambert

London visits BBC Studioworks

■ BBC Studioworks hosted RTS London in October for a hot-ticket tour of its updated facilities in White City.

Three studios offer large and mid-sized spaces available to hire, with Studio 1 still home to many shiny-floor shows, and

Studios 2 and 3 on long-term hire to ITV. Programmes filmed at the studios include ITV's *This Morning* and BBC One's *The Graham Norton Show*.

Most of the technical equipment has been updated, with lighting now nearly all

LED. Nostalgic elements of the building's original design are reflected in some of the decor.

BBC Studioworks is a commercial subsidiary of the BBC. The White City studios have been open since August 2017.

Kristin Mason

Sitcom writer gives masterclass

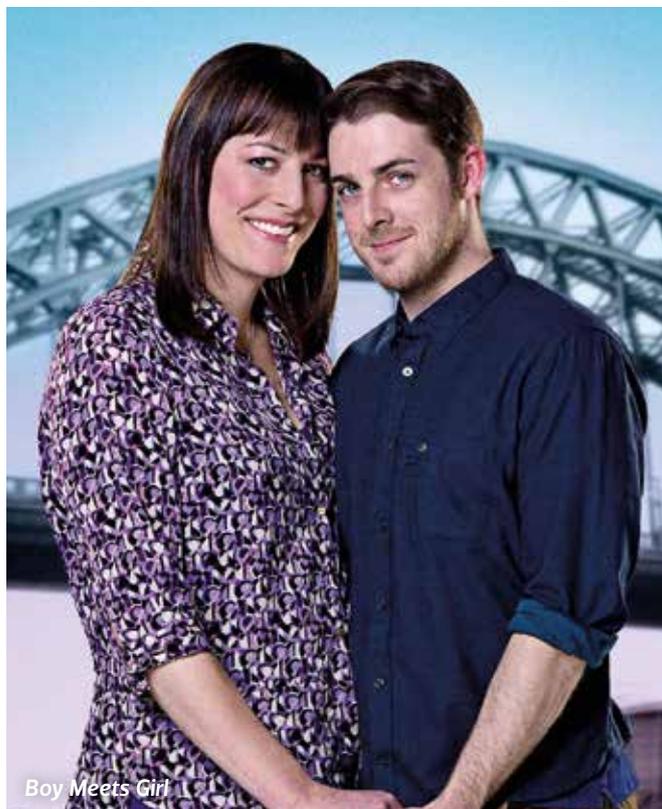
North East writer Elliott Kerrigan, who created *Boy Meets Girl* – the first sitcom to feature a trans actor in a lead role – has the BBC Writers Room to thank for his break.

“To get a show on TV is so hard – it’s like winning the lottery,” said Kerrigan, who lives in Cramlington, Northumberland, and admitted to knowing nobody in television when he first put pen to paper. Winning the Writers Room Trans Comedy Award took the writer from his “bedroom to the BBC”.

He continued: “It changed my life and I’m really grateful – if it wasn’t for the Writers Room, God knows what I’d be doing.”

Kerrigan was speaking at an RTS North East and the Border session on scriptwriting, co-produced with the BBC Writers Room, at the Tyneside Cinema, Newcastle.

The RTS Award-winning BBC Two sitcom *Boy Meets Girl* started life as an age-gap love story, without a trans element. “There was no real



North East & the Border

Matthew Bell reports from Digital Cities North East, a series of events for the creative industries in the region

hook that took it off the page – it was pretty stale,” recalled Kerrigan. He changed tack and made the two lead characters a same-sex couple, but “it still wasn’t working – it was rubbish”.

Then his attention was drawn to the Trans Comedy Award – and “Jude” became “Judy”.

“I’m not trans and I knew nothing about being trans, but I had a script and characters I cared for,” said Kerrigan. “Every character is based on my own family.”

Offering a tip to the young writers in the audience, Kerrigan said: “Your first page must be a killer.”

The writer followed his own advice to the letter in *Boy Meets Girl*. At the beginning of the very first episode, Judy (Rebecca Root) comes clean with her young date, Leo (Harry Hepple), on their first night out together:

“There’s something that I need to tell you. I can tell you later or I can tell you now, and I’d rather tell you now – I was born with a penis.” ■

How to get ahead in scriptwriting

■ The BBC Writers Room, in the words of its head, Anne Edyvean, ‘finds, develops and champions new writing talent across the BBC’. Every year, it receives some 13,000 scripts in response to its schemes and helps the best writers to develop their craft.

At the RTS North East and the Border session with Elliott Kerrigan, Usman Mullan, an assistant producer at the BBC Writers Room, offered scriptwriting tips, illustrating his advice with clips from shows

that included BBC Three supernatural drama *In the Flesh* and this year’s hit BBC One thriller *Bodyguard*.

Writers, argued Mullan, need passion to succeed. ‘Don’t try to second-guess what the BBC is looking for. Write what it is you want to write, not what you think people are looking for.’

A script should ‘hit the ground running’, Mullan said, adding: ‘You have about a minute to grab the attention of your audience, while they

decide whether to continue to watch or to switch over to another channel. You really need a strong hook.’

Writers, he suggested, ‘don’t always have to write about what [they] know, but they need to know [about] what they write. So, if you’re looking to explore a world you don’t know, then [do your] research.’

Characters should be ‘emotionally compelling’ so that viewers ‘want to spend time’ with them. ‘If you think

about great characters from drama, they are usually flawed, complex, and faced with strong emotional and moral dilemmas.’

‘Surprises’ are another key element of any script, argued Mullan, who is based at MediaCity, Salford.

‘Don’t be afraid to wrong-foot your audience – trust that they will figure things out for themselves. You should be springing surprises on your audience constantly,’ he said.

Matthew Bell

Damming the Nile

ONLINE
at the RTS

Sailing the Nile in VR

BBC

BBC Africa correspondent Alastair Leithead took the audience at the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art on a journey down the Nile in another North East and the Border session at Digital Cities North East.

Africa was the inspiration for BBC News's first virtual reality (VR) documentary, *Damming the Nile*. The corporation's man on the ground, Leithead, shared his steep learning curve with the audience in the North East, where he was brought up.

He discussed Ethiopia's ambitious project to dam the Nile and the political friction that it is causing downstream in Egypt. With stunning locations, rich cultural influences and the engineering wonder of building a dam, it was an easy pitch for a 30-minute TV programme, but this was to be told in a different way.

Leithead revealed how VR was forcing a rethink of TV reporting: 360° cameras hand power to the audience, which can choose to look in

Digital Cities North East

The week-long festival for the creative industries in Newcastle, Sunderland, Middlesbrough and Gateshead ran 15-19 October. The RTS, BBC Academy and Northern Film and Media were among the organisations that hosted free training events

any direction or even ignore the reporter's "piece to camera" altogether. Not being able to easily direct the viewer's gaze presents a new set of challenges to broadcasting's production and journalistic norms.

The all-seeing camera means there can be no cut-aways or sequences, and there's a different way of writing a script to pictures when the reporter doesn't know which way the viewer will be looking. Sound is designed to help lead the user.

For the audience, it offers a chance to move away from

being a passive observer on the sofa at home, and to immerse themselves in a story and decide what they would like to look at as the story unfolds.

Using a VR headset is the best way to see *Damming the Nile*, taking viewers into a virtual world travelling down the Nile. Rather than just watching the documentary on TV, there is a real sense of being with the reporter and the production team on their assignment, and of becoming immersed in the story they are telling.

For the audience in Middlesbrough there was a chance to experience VR at first hand and get a glimpse of how much of a shake-up it is for storytelling.

Leithead is now using his newly acquired VR skills to make a sequel that shines a light on the Democratic Republic of Congo. ■

Chris Jackson

A report on the Digital Cities North East/RTS North East and the Border event 'Anatomy of a hit: *Geordie Shore*' is on page 14.

■ As the nights draw in and the season for telling ghost stories arrives, we've been looking to television for a good fright. From *Doctor Who*'s Weeping Angels to *Stranger Things*' Demogorgon, you can learn how production teams set about creating some of television's scariest monsters. Fans of zombies, werewolves and other supernatural creatures should visit www.rts.org.uk/monsters.

■ Talking of supernatural icons, it was announced last month that the people behind *Sherlock*, Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss, are retelling the story of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* for BBC One and Netflix. Read more about the pair's plans to bring literature's most famous vampire to television (www.rts.org.uk/Dracula18).

■ Back in the real world, Kate Holman spoke to comedian Daniel Sloss about his new Netflix specials. Having started out on the comedy circuit at the tender age of 16, Sloss explains how his routines have changed, and why his latest show has led to the break up of more than 10,000 couples (www.rts.org.uk/DanielSloss).

■ Earlier this autumn, we announced 32 new RTS bursary recipients, who have just started their degrees in television production, broadcast journalism or computing and engineering. While they get to grips with lectures and leveraging their student discounts, we've been hearing from those who are further into their degrees. To find out what they've been up to, watch their video diaries (www.rts.org.uk/2018BursaryDiaries).

Pippa Shawley

RTS centres review the high points of this year's IBC tech fest in Amsterdam

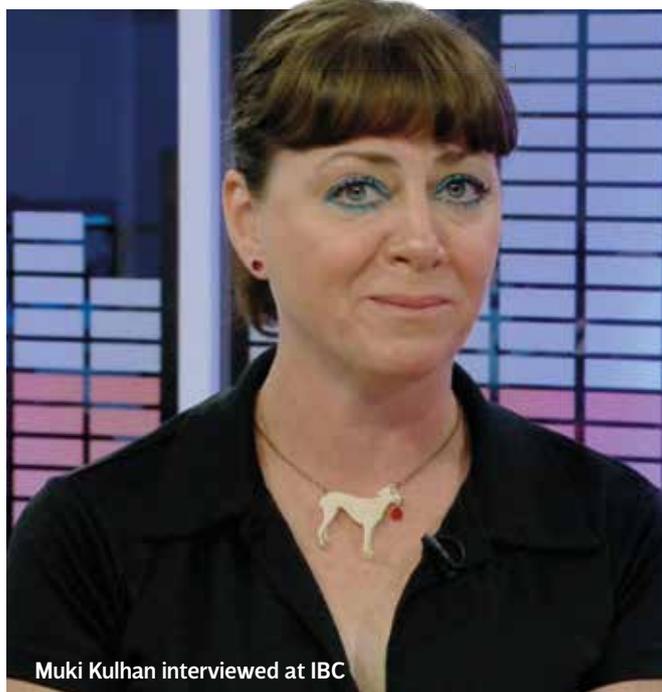
The International Broadcasting Convention (IBC) drew almost 56,000 people to Amsterdam in September, a small decrease on the year before. But there was a 14% rise in conference delegates.

The proportion of women panellists at the conference was up from 14% to 37%, said Channel 4 chief operating officer Keith Underwood, who chaired the IBC content steering group.

Speaking at a joint RTS London/Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) event in mid-October, he added that the new digital giants, such as Amazon and Netflix, were also well represented on panels.

Underwood said IBC had reflected “three key themes that we’re seeing in the marketplace”: a “huge change in consumer behaviour”; “globalisation and consolidation”, as recently seen in Comcast’s takeover of Sky; and the emergence of “breakthrough technologies”.

The evening was chaired



Muki Kulhan interviewed at IBC

Women and US giants step up

by digital executive producer Muki Kulhan, who also chaired sessions at IBC.

Another panellist, James Lovell, Cisco media account manager and IBC first-timer, was impressed by “the scale and breadth of things shown,

from IP production to cloud [technology] and [web] security, all the way through to fighting robots”.

David Short, vice-chair of the IET Multimedia Communications Network, first went to IBC in 1988. “The

memorable thing was an HDTV demonstration,” he recalled. “I thought, ‘Where’s that technology going to go? No one is ever going to be able to deliver HDTV to consumers.’ What a difference three decades makes.”

At IBC 2018, Short noticed that “over-the-top IP [internet] delivery was the new normal – when people talk about television, they’re talking about IP-delivered TV.”

Aradhna Tayal, director of Radio TechCon, the UK’s radio and audio technology conference, also made her IBC debut. She roamed the 15 halls for the long-running “What caught my eye” strand of IBC, in which experts reveal their favourite products at the trade show.

At the RTS/IET event, Tayal showed three videos shot for her IBC breakfast session, including one on Switcher Studio’s video creation platform, which is able to sync up to nine iPhones and iPads to create live multi-camera video streaming.

IBC’s floors were also full of quirky delights. Tayal “enjoyed seeing gadgets” on the exhibition floor: “One thing that was so cool was a drone that fits in a handbag – it folds up and it’s got a 4K camera with optical zoom.” ■

Matthew Bell

Machines learning how to think

■ Blockchain technology, diversity, machine learning and software services were the main themes of the Thames Valley/Southern IBC review. The panel at Queen Mary’s College, Basingstoke comprised: Ciaran Doran from Pixel Power; Neil Maycock of Grass Valley; Martin Parsons from Image Eyes; and Russell Trafford-Jones of Techex. It agreed that internet protocol (IP) was

here to stay, machine learning was ubiquitous and security was raising its head.

Doran recalled an IBC conference speaker referring to the disruption of over-the-top (OTT) services. He continued: ‘I thought OTT was the disruptor but blockchain is being used as a disruptor of OTT, which is itself a disruptor in television.’

Parsons said: ‘High dynamic range was everywhere, both at

the capture side and display. And the new dominant technology is machine learning, but I don’t like to call this artificial intelligence – it’s just repeated learning.’

‘The push for diversity is really good and it did stand out this year,’ said Trafford-Jones.

Moving on to discussing software services, he added: ‘It’s now clear that there is a real uptake of software-defined

networking without the need for traditional hardware, and I witnessed this for start-ups as well as established manufacturers.’

All the panellists agreed that even though IP was making a massive impact, serial digital interface (SDI) still had plenty of life left in it. IP won for a specific use case, but plug-and-play SDI had simplicity on its side. Although automated interconnectivity was gaining ground, IP was still very much in its infancy and needed a lot of coaxing.

Tony Orme

To mark the new series of *Doctor Who*, two of the key personnel – drama chief Simon Winstone and production designer Arwel Wyn Jones – discussed the making of the BBC One show at an RTS Wales event at the University of South Wales, Cardiff, in October.

The pair revealed how they brought new showrunner Chris Chibnall's vision to the screen – and how they swapped the familiar production base of South Wales for South Africa, where some of the series was shot.

Jones realised a lifelong ambition when he redesigned the interior of the Tardis for the new series. When asked if he had wanted to try something revolutionary with its design, he said: "There are certain things you have to stick with [such as] the six-sided console and the roundels."

But the production designer added that he was able to make the set look bigger and less rigid by adding infinity mirrors into the walls. "I wanted to play upon the 'dimensions' aspect of the Tardis," he said. "Basically, I'm a con artist – my



Doctor Who's Tardis

BBC

The Tardis regenerates

job is to make people believe they're seeing something that they aren't really seeing."

Jodie Whittaker's debut as the 13th Doctor attracted 10.9 million viewers – the show's highest ratings since it returned to TV after a 16-year break in 2005. The consolidated viewing figures are based on ratings body Barb's new four-screen

measurement, which includes TV sets, tablets, PCs and smartphones.

According to Jones, the BBC's drama studios at Roath Lock in Cardiff Bay, where *Doctor Who* has been shot since 2012, are key to the show's success: "London producers saw how good the crews were and *Doctor Who* has been crucial to the

present boom in drama production in South Wales."

Winstone – head of drama in Wales for BBC Studios, which oversees production at Roath Lock Studios – added: "Through [BBC] Studios, we now work on shows for a wide range of organisations – there are an awful lot of opportunities out there now."

Edward Russell

Futures visits The One Show

The One Show opened its doors to RTS Futures for a sold-out event in late October.

Audience researcher Emmy Little, who landed a job on the show after applying for a runner position posted on the Facebook group "People looking for TV work", fielded questions from RTS Futures members before they joined the audience for the live show.

"There's no shortcut," she said, and advised those with no TV experience to show their transferable skills from

jobs in customer services or student ventures such as TV societies at university.

"Good runners won't be runners for too long," she explained. "If you're really on it, you're very aware, and go above and beyond – it doesn't take people long to cotton on to that."

Little urged the attendees to pitch ideas, whether they are on a work experience placement, working as a runner or in a temporary job: "Think, 'What have I got that could stand out?' If you're

looking to be an assistant camera [operator], go out and shoot your own footage. If you want to get into news, find a story."

She added: "You learn a lot as a runner; it's a way of proving you can do the job before you get the job."

Answering questions about how to make it as a TV presenter, Little emphasised the importance of having an interest in a specific area. She explained: "There's no such thing as a general TV presenter any more. People

are looking for specialists – if you have something different to say on a topic, it helps."

Advising people working in local TV to gain experience where they can, she said: "Despite the low pay, there are opportunities to host shows, and then you can make a showreel. Also, radio is a great way in, there's some great regional content opportunities with them."

One of the few TV shows filmed at New Broadcasting House, *The One Show* has been a fixture on BBC One since its launch in 2006, featuring stories from around the UK and celebrity guests.

Kate Holman

Midlands hosts its first TV fair

Midlands Centre Midlands' inaugural careers fair attracted 600 young people to the Edgbaston cricket ground in mid-October to hear from industry experts.

Panel sessions took place throughout the day at the RTS event. "The secrets behind TV sport", hosted by BBC WM presenter Richard Wilford, featured *Sports Personality of the Year* deputy editor Michael Jackson, BBC sports news correspondent Natalie Pirks and BBC Sport editor Jo McCusker, who offered advice to budding sports broadcasters.

The entertainment panel boasted award-winning producers Mark Sidaway (*The X Factor*) and Charlie Irwin (*I'm a Celebrity...*), and Panda TV development executive Francesca Palmer (*Let It Shine*), who spoke to a packed room in a session hosted by TV presenter Trish Adudu.

The panel for the session on factual shows, hosted by ITV News London newsreader



Learning the craft of TV

John Bray

Suzanne Virdee, reflected the wide range of documentary programming on television.

Jodie Allt, production co-ordinator on *Blue Planet II*, Love Productions' Simon Evans (*Benefits Street*) and director Jeff Wilkinson (*In Solitary: The Anti-Social*

Experiment) gave valuable advice and answered a mass of questions from the floor.

BBC Academy gave tips on how to shoot short-form content, before the final panel of the day, which featured BBC Three commissioning editor Nasfim Haque, BBC

Radio 1 head of programmes Aled Haydn Jones and *Love Island* series editor Mike Spencer, revealed the secrets of making audience-grabbing shows. BBC News Midlands correspondent Sima Kotecha hosted the session.

At the end of their sessions, most panellists joined the teams in the exhibition area where they gave advice on writing CVs to the young people, aged 16-25, who had their eyes on a career in television.

In the exhibition area, a team from BBC One daytime drama *Doctors* invited the students to try their hand at acting, be part of the crew and learn the secrets of realistic medical injury make-up.

The *Midlands Today* team gave tips on making editorial decisions and BBC WM Sport offered attendees the opportunity to commentate on football. Workshops also covered fake news and shooting videos on mobile phones. **Dorothy Hobson**

Nottingham gets in toon for Aardman

■ Why has a naked man made of plasticine become one of the most popular animated figures of all time? What are the pitfalls of filming a stop-motion conversation between clay bats? And how does Shaun the Sheep look so fleecy?

A crowd of animation fans were let in on those secrets and more at the very first 'Animorsels' evening at Antenna, Nottingham, in late October.

Aardman model-maker Jim Parkyn was the star attraction at the event, which was organised by the Nottingham-based animation and production

company, Bottletop and sponsored by RTS Midlands.

The theme was stop-motion animation and the crowd had a chance to look back at Parkyn's old favourites, including *Creature Comforts* and some of Morph's darker antics, alongside a range of short animated features from independent producers and a Halloween-themed montage of the audience's own bite-sized animations.

Bottletop creative director Mark Pyper, who organised the

event, said he hopes to make Animorsels a regular feature in Nottingham: 'Animators in the East Midlands don't always have the chance to get together and

share creative ideas. This is a chance to socialise with people who share your passion, to hear what's happening in the world of animation and even pass on some tips.'

And the secret of Shaun's fleecy coat? Well, apparently, they use fleece.

Sally Bowman



Shaun the Sheep BBC

Planet Earth comes alive

East
Centre

New camera technology was the secret of *Planet Earth II*'s immersive storytelling, allowing viewers to make an emotional connection with the natural world, Mike Gunton told an RTS East event in October.

The creative director of the BBC's Natural History Unit spoke about the challenges of making the series to an audience of 120 RTS East members, creative professionals and students at Norwich University of the Arts.

Working on *Planet Earth II*, alongside David Attenborough, was the pinnacle of Gunton's 30-year, 250-film career in wildlife film-making.

He discussed the continual challenge of coming up with something "bigger, more ambitious, riskier" each time, arguing that *Planet Earth II* had transformed natural history production by using new miniature cameras, specialist supports and drones to show



Planet Earth II

BBC

the world from the animals' point of view, rather than observing from afar.

The thrilling scene when a young iguana escapes near-certain death in an encounter with a nest of racer snakes has been viewed by more than 500 million people. "This made a connection with the audience in an extraordinary, visceral way," Gunton said. "If you can get the entire country to care about whether a tiny reptile escapes, you're making a connection."

Yet, only five years ago it was not possible to film scenes in this way. Gunton explained the crucial role of new technology in transforming wildlife series. Small

cameras on Movi gyro-stabilised supports allowed *Planet Earth II* camera operators to run alongside and capture the ordeal as the iguana experienced it. The same technology put the viewer into the centre of a swarm of a billion locusts, providing an "extraordinary sense of what it's like to be inside that world".

Remote solar-powered, motion-activated cameras enabled Gunton's team to capture intimate images of a creature so elusive it had evaded Attenborough throughout his long career. For the first time, *Planet Earth II* was able to film the rare and solitary snow leopard in the Himalayas.

"These are the stories you can't see with your own eyes. It's only possible with the power of the lens and new technological solutions," said Gunton, who suggested that the snow leopards' socialising habit of tagging isolated rocks with urine and scent is a "weird big cat cross between Tinder and Facebook".

High-quality natural history series such as *Planet Earth II* are crucial to attract a younger audience away from the smartphone screen to enjoy a powerful shared experience, argued Gunton. "*Planet Earth II* went against *X Factor*, appealing to the same audience, and crushed it," he said.

Robert Ambrose

Radharc docs: a force for good

Republic
of Ireland

The RTS Republic of Ireland event in late October threw a light on the *Radharc* documentaries, made over almost four decades by a film unit of Catholic priests in Ireland.

At RTÉ Dublin, Peter McEvoy explained how the

Radharc – Gaelic for vision – films started. They are not religious programmes as such, but reflect a spiritual ethos. McEvoy, a former RTÉ producer, used excerpts from the films to illustrate *Radharc*'s broad geographic and thematic reach.

The first *Radharc* film aired in 1962 and, over the next 34 years, RTÉ broadcast more than 400 programmes.

The film-makers were not afraid to tackle difficult topics. Their standing as clergy allowed them a level of access that a team of lay

film-makers might not have secured. *Night Flight to Uli*, filmed in Biafra during the Nigerian civil war, brought the famine in the region to the world's living rooms and led to the launch of the charity Concern.

The *Radharc* Archive is headed by Peter Dunn, a brother of one of the *Radharc* founders, Fr Joe Dunn.

Charles Byrne

OFF MESSAGE

Hearty congratulations to Leeds for being chosen as Channel 4's new northern HQ. To think, on the eve of the announcement, media types were convinced that Manchester would be revealed as the broadcaster's non-metropolitan home.

Leeds could not be a more fitting choice. The city even has a claim to be the original Hollywood. French artist Louis Le Prince filmed moving pictures on Leeds Bridge in 1888, an event that is regarded by some film historians as the beginning of cinema.

The peerless Alan Bennett is, of course, a native of Leeds, where his father was a butcher – and the inspiration for Film 4's wonderful comedy *A Private Function*.

Already, a campaign is underway to name Channel 4's new base after another famous Yorkshireman, *Countdown*'s Richard Whiteley. Richard's was the first face to appear on Channel 4 when the network launched in 1982.

There is a kind of precedent for this. Two years ago, the BBC renamed the home of Radio 2 Wogan House.

■ **Much is rightly written about the lack of female screenwriters. Earlier this year, the Writers Guild of Great Britain reported that only 28% of all**

UK TV episodes between 2001 and 2016 were written predominantly by women. So, it's highly encouraging that YouTube's first European big-budget scripted show, the sci-fi epic *Origin*, which launched earlier this month, is written by Mika Watkins.

You may have read of how Watkins's ability as a wordsmith was first spotted when she was working as an intern at Left Bank. It was there that she developed the script for *Origin*.

Of course, winning commissions, especially for a drama written by an untested writer, is rarely straightforward. Before YouTube greenlit the project, Channel 4 and Sky both passed on *Origin*.

Let's hope that the series succeeds (the writer is also the drama's show-runner), but, even if it doesn't, a bright future beckons for Mika Watkins.

■ Good to see Sir David Attenborough returning to Sunday-night television with BBC One's *Dynasties*.

The opening episode, which focused on the story of an aging male chimpanzee called David (a complete coincidence) was a genuine treat.

And now we learn that the great man is making a series for Netflix. There is a kind of inevitability in this move. You may remember that Sir David was one of the first broadcasters to seize the opportunity to front some of Sky's 3D films.

He may be 92, but the man who, as

controller of BBC Two, oversaw the introduction of colour TV in the 1960s remains at the leading edge of technological innovation 50 years later. Extraordinary.

■ **Evan Davis's empathetic and cerebral interviewing style on *Newsnight* was not to everyone's taste. For some, he always suffered for avoiding the attack-dog approach of his predecessor, Jeremy Paxman.**

Yet, his less aggressive interviewing style often yielded enlightening results. His final *Newsnight* was a masterclass in this approach to interviewing politicians, as he patiently extracted several nuggets from George Osborne.

If you missed the programme, it's definitely worth catching on iPlayer.

■ It may not have escaped your attention that the festive season is just around the corner. If you are looking for media books to give as presents, then Off Message can make some recommendations.

Edward Stourton's *Auntie's War: The BBC During the Second World War* sounds like a fascinating read.

For something a little lighter, children's TV guru Lewis Rudd's recently published memoir, *Not Just About Man-aging*, could hit the spot.

And don't forget Jon Plowman's *How to Produce Comedy Bronze*, reviewed in this edition of *Television*.

Happy reading.



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