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Rebecca Hodges r.hodges@audionetwork.com (0)207 566 1441





# From the CEO



The man who wrote Britain's answer to HBO's Boardwalk Empire, the brilliant crime drama Peaky Blinders, is the subject of this month's cover

story. Andrew Billen interviewed Steven Knight and found that his life story really is stranger than fiction. Don't miss this riveting read. In my opinion, it is one of Andrew's best ever interviews for Television.

Steven recounts how his childhood in Birmingham provided him with the inspiration for Peaky Blinders.

RTS Cambridge is only weeks away. I am thrilled by our stellar line-up of speakers. If you haven't secured your place at the convention, then I advise you to book soon.

To help set the scene for Cambridge,

ITV Chief Executive Carolyn McCall. the convention's chair, outlines her thinking for the RTS conference in an interview with Television. She explains, among other things, how a panel of consumers will be a key part of this year's Cambridge agenda.

We also profile one of the convention's US speakers, Linda Yaccarino, head of advertising and partnerships at NBCUniversal. Linda is less well known in the UK than she is across the Atlantic, where she is regarded as one of the most powerful women in television. I think that Cambridge delegates are in for a treat.

Two topics bound to be discussed at the convention are the controversy over free TV licences for the over-75s and the looming battle for SVoD supremacy. Torin Douglas writes a definitive account of the wrangling

over licence fees for the over-75s, which provides a lot of context. Mathew Horsman's piece on the contest to own the on-demand market is typically well-informed and incisive.

In keeping with the accent on Cambridge, this month's Our Friend column has an East Anglian flavour. Chris Page will need no introduction to viewers in the ITV Anglia region. His sometimes maverick approach to weather forecasting is often a talking point in his part of the country.

Our diarist this month is Good Morning Britain editor Neil Thompson, who shares a fascinating and hilarious account of life in the hot seat.

Theresa Wise

# ontents

**Neil Thompson's TV Diary** 

Neil Thompson bumps into his ex-boss in the mosh pit at Latitude - and doorsteps Snoop Dogg in Hollywood

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her plans for the Cambridge Convention Playing a Brummie blinder Andrew Billen meets the creator of Peaky Blinders, Steven Knight, whose life story is stranger than fiction

Will Boris bail out the BBC? Torin Douglas reveals how the row over free licences for the elderly is weighing on the corporation

'Our audience is not declining, it is just dispersing NBCUniversal's Linda Yaccarino outlines her company's multi-platform strategy to Steve Clarke

Our Friend in the East Weathermen require a cool head – especially when hanging from a zip wire, says Chris Page

Online content comes of age Kate Bulkley discovers how digital-first players are making money and gaining kudos

The rise and rise of David Gyasi The actor describes to Ben Dowell what happened when he finally landed a leading part

Major and Murdoch's tug of war Stewart Purvis reveals how new documents illuminate the conflict between the media mogul and ex-prime minister

Steve Clarke smclarke 333@hotmail.com News editor and writer bell127@btinternet.com

Production, design, advertising Gordon Jamieson gordon.jamieson.01@gmail.com

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

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# TVdiary

**Neil Thompson** bumps into his ex-boss in the mosh pit at Latitude – and doorsteps Snoop Dogg in Hollywood



K, in the spirit of apologetic full disclosure, this ain't a normal week for me. It's August. Piers and Susanna are off (deservedly – thought I'd better slip that in) on their French car factorystyle summer sojourn. I'm also sneaking in a bit of R&R and extracurricular that the normal 100-hour week doesn't allow.

■ At Latitude, the hybrid Glasto crossed with church fête Suffolk festival, where, among the middle aged of the mojito-fuelled mosh pit, I bump (literally) into my ex-ITV boss Peter Fincham for our annual blokey embrace.

We compare notes about Loyle Carner and Freya Ridings like we know what we're talking about. Trot off to Neneh Cherry, whom I do.

- Best beginning to the working week ever, albeit with post-festival lurgy looming large. Fly off to LA, where we're working on a great little joint venture with ITV America. Depart Terminal 5 feeling 80%, arrive 11 hours later at 40%, fly back four days later at 20%, but job mostly done. Hey ho.
- We decamped *Good Morning Britain* to LA in February for our Oscars coverage. Despite a peristaltically challenging failure of comms mid-TX, the show was a total hit, especially with

the viewers – almost four points up on 2018. We came off air following a live carousel of many of Hollywood's minted media stars, including a good number scooped up in the moment.

I had pursued Snoop Dogg into the lavs of our Beverly Hills Hotel OB location, where he politely declined my advances. But I was a lot luckier with Roger Taylor, fresh from wowing the ceremony with *Bohemian Rhapsody*. Piers asked: "Was that a train wreck?" Susanna just winked, knowing it had been a triumph.

- Individually, Piers and Susanna are class acts; and, together, a class pairing. I won't repeat my Jack and Vera Duckworth casting principle here. Both are at their best when the show is at its best − live, spontaneous and fleet of foot, such as when a big, breaking story has ripped up our running order on–air. Or Piers has ripped out his earpiece because he's fed up with being told we're 15 minutes over in the middle of a gripping interview.
- The excitement of the programme's live coverage of, quite literally, everything has ended ITV Breakfast's 18-year purdah on TV prizes: two RTS nominations, two Bafta ones and a Golden Nymph gong for Live Breaking News. All that in the past 15 months. Not to mention five years of successive growth in share and volume, reversing a decade of decline. Oh, yeah, and fending off 500 other journos to

scoop the Ultimate News Quiz two years running. What a team!

■ Back to the UK with a bump, missing half our anchors, literally and metaphorically, but the show goes on.

The summer bookings are crucial to our overall performance. The first week of August is traditionally our trickiest week of the year, but our exclusives have included Khadijah Mellah, the hijab-wearing teenage jockey, fresh from her win at Goodwood (and we plan to watch her open her A-level results live on air the following week).

And, in the wake of the El Paso massacre, we had Aaron Stark, who was a hair trigger away from carrying out a high-school and shopping-mall shooting himself, plus *Love's Island's* Curtis Pritchard on sexuality and his ongoing relationship with Maura Higgins.

Result? We're up two points year on year.

■ The following day brings a debate on whether, from a point of sexual appeal, we should "mind the gap" in our teeth, sparked by Dakota Johnson's evident closure of her own dental divide.

It allows me in the morning meeting to quote Chaucer's gap-toothed, sexually liberated feminist role model, the Wife of Bath. Only on *GMB*. Nuff said.

Neil Thompson is editor of ITV's Good Morning Britain.

# EAR CANDY



# **Kate Holman** tunes in to Craig Mazin dissecting his brilliant TV series



hocking. Bleak. Controversial. Devastatingly brilliant. All these descriptions are true of HBO's five-part retelling of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. The HBO and Sky series has been one of the most talked-about dramas of the year so far, lauded by critics and helping to confirm the current golden age of TV.

At times, the events depicted in the programme were so incredible that many viewers have questioned what was real and what is made up.

Luckily, HBO has released *The Chernobyl Podcast* in conjunction with Pineapple Street Media. It features the writer and creator of the show, Craig Mazin, and is hosted by the American humourist Peter Sagal.

Introducing the series as "a show

that makes you want to talk about it", Sagal delves into the shocking stories portrayed in *Chernobyl*.

The pair analyse each episode and highlight which characters and events were real, and discuss topics such as the decision not to give the cast Russian accents.

Mazin and Sagal also debate some of the bigger moral questions arising from the disaster. These include Chernobyl investigator Valery

'MAZIN DISCUSSES SCENES THAT WERE CUT... FOR BEING TOO GRUESOME' Legasov's controversial decision to lie to the International Atomic Energy Agency about the scale of the catastrophe in episode 4, and why the Soviet authorities concealed the truth from their own people.

Despite the harrowing nature of the material, the podcast is surprisingly enjoyable, and it's illuminating to hear the truth concerning the world's biggest nuclear disaster.

Mazin discusses scenes that were cut from the show for being too gruesome.

He also reveals shocking personal stories of sacrifice that he didn't have the space to put into his narrative.

For a disaster where many of the "facts" remain unclear, the podcast adds texture to the vivid TV retelling.

Poignantly, it asks whether the victims will ever be treated justly.



time you ever saw anyone with a genuine disability in the media as a model was in a charity appeal with an outstretched hand.

The one thing I would love to achieve is for someone's disability to be literally unremarkable.

# How can casting directors make your job easier?

We're often approached by casting directors looking to cast someone with

a disability, and they come to us with a very specific set of physical characteristics.

That's usually because they've cast everyone else first. Say, if this character is in a family, it means this per-

son has to have a certain accent or be of a particular ethnicity or age, to match the rest of the cast.

They've got a massive, almost endless, pool of people for the rest of the family. It would be really good if they started with us and cast the family around the person with the disability.

# How can casting directors make life easier for people with disabilities?

You'd be staggered by how many people still arrange for castings in studios that are not physically accessible for people with impaired mobility. They ask to see a wheelchair user, and the audition is on the third floor, and there's no lift. That's just astonishing.

People think it's fine because they've got guys who are strong enough to carry the chair, but why on earth put someone at a total disadvantage before they've even opened their mouth? They've already had an undignified and potentially dangerous experience just to physically get into the room. Why not just go somewhere where it's step-free?

# What do you think about able-bodied actors being cast in disabled roles?

It shows a paucity of imagination to not even look for an actor with a disability who could take that role. If you don't even look, really suitable people have absolutely no chance of achieving big roles.

We see this a lot in Hollywood. I'm completely aware of the fact that

they're looking for somebody who is "box office" to get something greenlit, but, at the same time, how does anyone achieve that level of profile unless they're given the chance to at least try for the role?

# How do you find new talent?

We don't actually have to go and look for them, these days everybody comes to us. Every single day we receive masses of new applications, and we that possibility. For the first 14 years, I had no income whatsoever from VisABLE. I sold my old business, which enabled me to run the company without needing to take an income. I didn't take a holiday for 20 years.

### What changed?

Channel 4 rang me out of the blue. It was August 2016 and they said that, after the Paralympics, they were really keen to build on that success. They

were looking to see where they could make the greatest impact in helping to get more people with disabilities on television, and they concluded

The agent for disabled talent

also have a backlog of people that we need to respond to.

However, if I spot someone and I think that they have potential, I won't hesitate to contact them if I can, and ask if they've ever considered this kind of work. I spotted someone on *First Dates* and it turned out he was in our backlog!

### How would someone apply?

The back end of our website is a massive, really sophisticated booking system, which is wonderful. On it, we provide everybody with a total blueprint of everything they need to know, from how to achieve great profiles to adding acting clips. It's all free.

# What is the best thing about your job?

The thing I'm probably proudest of is getting Cerrie Burnell, who has one hand, cast as a CBeebies presenter a few years ago. It was an uphill battle to get her in that role, but now a whole generation has grown up seeing disability as completely ordinary. Children, of course, educate their parents into reviewing their own preconceptions. I think that's really powerful.

# What has been the most challenging thing about your job?

For the first 22 years of VisABLE, I did everything completely single-handedly. I had no help whatsoever, and I would literally work through every single night. Working from home gives you

that VisABLE was the best conduit.

Somehow, they had found out that I had no help, and they said they would pay for an assistant for me for a year, who ended up doing it for a year and a half. It was just fantastic.

There is still far more work than just the two of us can cope with, but it just made it possible to draw breath occasionally.

# What is the worst thing about your job?

The paperwork. The contracts are very, very, very long indeed. Perhaps unlike other people, I read every page on a contract, and I renegotiate the terms if it's not what I feel we've agreed or what's best for the artists. If I really wanted to spend my days doing that, I would have been a lawyer.

# What's your advice for people wanting to cast more disabled talent?

I wish people would ask us any questions they're concerned about.

The people at the top of their game already do this. They pick up the phone and say, "We're casting for someone with Downs syndrome, but I've never actually met anyone with it and I don't know what to expect, can you tell me?"

That's wonderful, because it gives me the opportunity to immediately dispel any concerns they have.

Louise Dyson was interviewed by Pippa Shawley.



reparations are nearly complete. Ammunition stockpiled, ambassadors withdrawn, armies primed, enemies formally on notice. The full-throated battle between the digital streamers and the legacy media giants is nigh.

Bolstered by a series of hefty corporate mergers (AT&T-Warner, Disney-Fox, Comcast-Sky, Discovery-Scripps and the recently announced re-merger of Viacom and CBS), the old guard is hoping to be big enough to take on the Faangs at their own game, delivering content not just via old-fashioned broadcast, cable and satellite, but streamed over the internet whenever consumers choose.

The latest to confirm battle plans is telecoms giant AT&T, whose Warner-Media division is planning to launch HBO Max – a brand-new, high-end subscription video-on-demand service – in its home market next spring. The plan is to remove Warner content from Netflix and Amazon, at least in the US, as soon as contracts allow.

The new service joins a crowded and

# **On-demand TV**

# Mathew Horsman analyses the coming fight for audiences as the old guard prepares to take on the digital streamers

expanding roster of SVoD streamers. Already massive in the US are market leader Netflix (60 million in the US, with a further 90 million internationally), Amazon Prime Video (reportedly 100 million international subscribers, although the company does not reveal numbers) and relative minnow Hulu, now controlled outright by Disney, with around 28 million customers, all of them in the US.

Disney and Comcast, like AT&T, have big plans to expand in the SVoD space, and their strategies are hugely reflective of their past trajectories.

Comcast, a significant cable operator

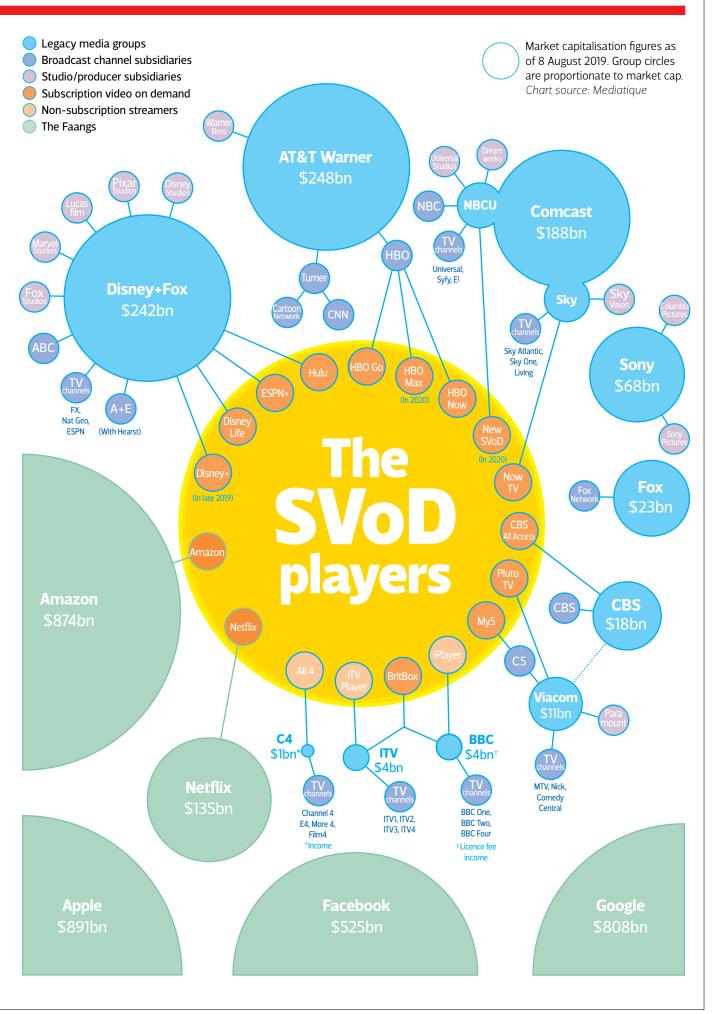
in its home market, bought NBCUniversal in 2011, and took full control in 2013, giving it a Hollywood studio, production assets and a broadcast and pay-TV channels business.

Its other core business, pay-TV, has suffered persistent "cord cutting" and "cord shaving". The decline has been exacerbated by the success not only of new pay-TV providers (satellite and then IPTV) but new entrants Netflix and Amazon.

Comcast's response was to promote its broadband internet network (replacing pay-TV revenues with broadband income) and launch its own skinny bundles.

More recently, it gave a berth to the enemy, distributing Amazon Prime Video, Netflix and other "over-the-top" (OTT) services directly to its cable customers.

The approach was similar to the strategy favoured by UK pay-TV giant Sky, which launched its own OTT service, Now TV, to counter pressures on its traditional satellite pay-TV business and then agreed last year to carry Netflix on a bundled basis on Sky Q, its high-end IP-connected product. >



Indeed, now that Comcast owns Sky (following the closely fought battle with Disney for the privilege), the Now TV technology will be used to roll out an SVoD brand in the US and continental Europe in the course of 2020. The plan is to make it free to any Comcast or Sky subscriber and available for a fee to non-subscribers.

Disney, for its part, has been a supplier to pay-TV platforms in the past but not an operator itself. It now faces declining revenues from pay-TV aggregators (it supplies the Disney channels, ESPN and films to premium channels such as HBO, Starz and Showtime).

At the same time, it has professed itself no longer willing to contribute to the success of Netflix and Amazon by supplying them with attractive content. Comcast, like Warner, is determined to do the same regarding NBCU rights, at least in the US.

Disney will have multiple brands, including ESPN, DisneyLife (the kid's service already available in the UK) and Hulu. The last is now controlled outright by Disney, with an edgier content vibe.

But the big bet is Disney+. It will launch in the US in November and promises exclusives (Marvel, Pixar, *Star Wars* and original series) and library content for a lower monthly price than Netflix.

A crowded field indeed. Within a year or so, US households will be able to choose from Netflix, Amazon, Disney, HBO, Comcast and a host of niche providers. Apple is making yet another effort to get TV right, while Facebook Watch and Google's YouTube both have long-form ambitions.

Right now, the average US SVoD subscriber has 2.8 services (with Netflix by far the commonest). Will Disney et al encourage consumers to pay for more streaming services? The appetite for multiple subscriptions is going to be sorely tested. There will be a limit to the number of separate services that consumers are willing to pay for.

Over time, pressures will build for streamers to consolidate and aggregate, just as pay-TV did in the past.

In the streamer wars, not everyone can win.

More to the point, many of those with direct-to-consumer (DTC) aspirations may not have the required skills set, at least not at first. Subscriber acquisition, churn management and customer service do not come naturally to those with a business-to-business bent.

# 'THE APPETITE FOR MULTIPLE SUBSCRIPTIONS IS GOING TO BE SORELY TESTED'

Perhaps mindful of the risks, Warner will not be launching its new SVoD service in every market, at least not right away. It, too, wants the income it enjoys from distributors in markets such as the UK, Ireland, Germany, Australia and Italy – all of them served by Sky with an HBO deal still in place.

While it is still too early to say, what am I bid that Disney will tread more carefully in the markets where Sky has paying customers – and continue to receive safe affiliate income from pay-TV operators while it runs the greater risks at home? That there will be a Disney DTC service soon in the UK I have no doubt; but it may initially be more "Disney Minus" than "Disney Plus".

Placing bets on the battle ahead will be nerve-racking, but here are a few pointers. Despite the recent consolidation spree, the contestants aren't that evenly matched. If we count up all the revenues generated last year by US companies with a Hollywood studio and/or a US network (that is: Disney, Sony, Comcast-NBCU, Fox, AT&T-Warner, CBS and Viacom), we come close to, but do not exceed, the \$500bn mark.

For their part, the five Faang companies – whose businesses

admittedly go far beyond media and entertainment (extending to search, social media, online retail, hardware devices and short-form content) had revenues last year of more than \$700bn. They are gunning for the advertising and subscription income traditionally attributed to "television".

Perhaps more importantly, investors think the game is even more lopsided than the revenues suggest. By market capitalisation, the Faangs are worth four times the value ascribed to the studios and broadcasters listed above (\$3.2tr plays a paltry \$800bn).

Size isn't everything, perhaps. If the streamers really are starved of legacy content, they will have to spend even more on their own programmes and investors may lose patience.

Amazon and Apple won't be worried, and Facebook and Google are making different bets. But what about Netflix, whose content bill continues to increase? Its ability to win new customers depends significantly on the next, rather than the last, hit. Meanwhile, retaining customers has been largely about its acquired programmes (Warner's Friends, Comcast's The Office, Disney's Grey's Anatomy), and those are likely to be lost over time. This does explain Netflix's doubling down on new commissions to build and add to a strong library. Certainly, its domestic market is feeling the squeeze. Recent results showed a net loss of customers following recent price rises.

In all this, domestic UK media players may be hoping that size really doesn't matter; that the breadth and depth of original UK content will continue to find favour with audiences. BritBox, the modest UK offering, will test that appetite in the on-demand space from later this year.

The combined revenues of the BBC, ITV and Channel 4 were only around £8bn in 2018, compared with \$60bn for Disney alone.

And conjure this: Amazon generates enough revenue in a single day to pay for free TV licences for all over-75s for a year. Maybe we should ask it to?

# Content, consumers and everything in between

# **Business**

# ITV CEO Carolyn McCall guides Steve Clarke through her plans for RTS Cambridge

t may be Carolyn McCall's first RTS Cambridge but she knows what she wants from the convention's speakers. They should be positive and provocative. She also wants to hear from the voices of the people who consume the content.

"There is no point going into the Cambridge Convention with an attitude of 'It's all doom and gloom'. Yes, there are challenges but the opportunities for content creators have never been greater," she emphasises.

"Netflix has its challenges, too," she continues. "It has a huge amount of debt, a huge growth target. No one knows how it's going to navigate that over the next five years.

"If you're us, you're transforming your company and reinventing what you do for a digital world, even though your channels still remain incredibly important."

The ITV Chief Executive is speaking the day before she will announce ITV's interim results – they turn out to be better than anticipated. It is one of the hottest days of the year. London

feels like Lagos. Minutes earlier, Boris Johnson was announced as the Conservative Party's new leader.

Neither of these headline–making events distracts ITV's CEO as, with obvious enthusiasm, she describes her thinking behind the biennial convention and gives a taste of some of the sessions we can look forward to. McCall, who recently passed the 18–month mark running ITV, is chairing this year's convention. She will be presiding over the three–day talking

# What she's watching

Love Island (with her three teenage children): 'I haven't missed an episode. I am watching it either live or on catch-up. It's brilliant entertainment.'

Killing Eve, Big Little Lies Summer sport – particularly horse racing shop, "Content, consumers and everything in between".

What she hails as an "explosion of content" is good for content creators and content owners, she reasons. It is also a win for consumers. They can watch their favourite shows when and where they choose to do so on their screen of choice. This, of course, has disrupted business models.

"Funding models for content are changing," says McCall. "We need to reflect that at the conference... Different funding models often coexist in the same homes and in the same media companies."

The ITV chief and her team have assembled a galaxy of media stars for Cambridge. But, before we get to them, she wants to talk about consumers – the audience, without whom anyone who works for a media company would be picking up their P45s.

"One of the things our research says is that consumers are overwhelmed by choice to the extent that they sometimes get paralysed and don't know what to watch," she says. "How do we, as players in the >

# Brexit misery for advertising

Carolyn McCall: 'Prolonged uncertainty over Brexit has had a negative impact this year on advertising. It makes life much more difficult because you don't really know when that economic uncertainly will be finished. Dealing with the volatility this brings has been the hardest bit.'

# Why PSB is still essential

**Carolyn McCall:** 'I think public service broadcasting is more important than it has ever been. If you don't have trusted, accurate sources, not just for news, but wider than that, in current affairs and content, then you are on a slippery slope.

'It's very important for British society to have PSB. What is anachronistic are some of the uneven rules. Online is still a bit like the Wild West while TV is the most regulated medium in the world.

'i'm not necessarily asking for less regulation, I'm just saying it's uneven. We need a modern-day broadcasting act because the last one was in 2003. Think what's changed in those 15 years.'

# Nailing the BritBox deal

Carolyn McCall: 'It's not an easy thing to do to get large organisations who are in the same market to agree on something. It's complex and difficult, which is probably why it hasn't happened before....

'A lot of people talk about collaboration and co-operation but they don't really mean it. Often it's just a deal.

'Increasingly, you have to choose those people you really want to collaborate and partner with, and do it at a much deeper level than you've done before. BritBox is a very good example of that.'



➤ industry, navigate that? Debating that at Cambridge will be very interesting."

To involve consumers directly in the convention's discussions, the conference will feature a small group of viewers, the People's Panel. They will provide a continuous reality check on proceedings via a live link.

"We want Cambridge to bring in the voice of the consumer," insists McCall. "The panel is being produced by the brilliant Emma Gormley, who is in charge of all of our daytime shows. She wants it to be accessible, fast-paced and relevant. "If you want to talk about consumers it makes sense to have some real-life consumers in the room. We can do research that brings them in by proxy, but we wanted them to be there in the room with us."

Based at ITV Studios in Leeds, Ranvir Singh, *Good Morning Britain*'s political presenter, will anchor the panel. Over the three days, delegates will get to know this group of people as their views are canvassed during some of the sessions. They have been selected to be representative across gender, age, ethnicity, and their religious and political views.

McCall wants "the convention, as a

whole, to feel lively. We shouldn't ever be far away from what consumers think. We want to avoid navel gazing – in other words, the industry talking to itself. The Leeds panel is there to ground Cambridge in reality."

"One of the most important challenges we face is engaging consumers and attracting them to our content in preference to others," explains McCall. "Because there is so much content, addressability and discoverability are probably two of the most essential things.

"We have to think about what personalisation really means and how many people really want it. Do they feel it's intrusive? Is it done properly?"

Cambridge is renowned for attracting the media world's big beasts – 2019 has them in abundance. The ITV CEO is particularly pleased that her Netflix counterpart, Reed Hastings, is attending: "I think one of the attractions for Reed in deciding to attend Cambridge was that he would be able to meet everyone in the same place. It's fantastic that we got him."

Alongside the leaders of the BBC, Channel 4 and Ofcom (in what will be Sharon White's Cambridge swansong)



speakers from outside the UK include Discovery CEO David Zaslav, who is a convention veteran, and Linda Yaccarino, head of advertising sales and client partnerships at NBCUniversal. She will provide the curtain raiser to a session on advertising chaired by the *Financial Times*'s John Gapper who coined the phrase "Mad Men to Math Men".

Last summer, he asked, provocatively, if today's obsession with data would eventually extinguish the kind of freewheeling, Madison Avenue-style creativity personified by the stylish Don Draper. Gapper's panel features: Nils Leonard, founder of creative studio Uncommon and Philippa Brown, global CEO of media buying agency PHD Worldwide.

Another Cambridge star speaker is Sir Lenny Henry, a consistent and vocal campaigner for greater diversity in the TV sector. He will be joined at the convention by Group M's CEO, Karen Blackett.

"I first met Lenny about 15 months ago, very early on in my time at ITV. Karen is someone I've known for a long time. She knows Lenny well and does a lot of work with him in diversity," says McCall. "He really wants to

talk about this and to challenge people's perception of what it's like, even when you're famous, to actually cut through in production."

As well as diversity, Cambridge will also – in a break with precedent – have a panel devoted to discussing unscripted content. Stephen Lambert, the man behind *Gogglebox, The Secret Millionaire* and *Undercover Boss*, Channel 4 CEO Alex Mahon and RTS conference stalwart Tim Hincks are all booked for what is bound to be a standout session.

With several big players preparing to launch their own SVoD services – not least ITV, whose collaboration with the BBC, BritBox, is imminent – the vexed question of rights ownership has emerged as a key issue for broadcasters and streamers alike.

"IP is more important than it has ever been," says McCall, who, alongside BBC Director-General Tony Hall, laid out the launch plans for BritBox in July. For £5.99 a month, the platform will offer a service described by Hall as "truly British, showcasing our culture and telling distinctive British stories".

"There is definitely a gap in the SVoD market for British originated content," says McCall. "All of the services have a sprinkling of it but, over the next couple of years, that will all be coming back to BritBox.

"It will be the place where you get multi-series box sets that are British originated. When I say multi-series, that is the most important thing. There won't be just one series of a show."

She adds: "BritBox is not trying to do what Disney or Apple will do, or what Netflix and Amazon do, it's a completely different service.

"The valid question, of course, is how many of these subscriptions can any one family take? What is clear from the research is that people are open to having multiple subscriptions, so long as they are good value and provide what they want."

Would she ever put *Love Island* exclusively on BritBox? "Not today, but who knows? I don't know the answer to that because I don't know what is going to change in the next three years. Look what's changed in the past three years.

"What I will say today is that you'll be able to see all the back series of *Love Island* on BritBox. Today, you won't see the current series live as it's running on ITV2. But everything is evolving."

# The Billen profile

Andrew Billen meets the creator of Peaky Blinders, Steven Knight, whose life story is stranger than fiction

he screenwriter about to become a studio mogul; the boardgame inventor whose next drama will launch Apple's foray into television; the *Who Wants*To Be a Millionaire? creator nominated for an Oscar – there are many ways to paraphrase the extraordinary career of Steven Knight. Let's start, however, with the blacksmith's son who launched a million haircuts.

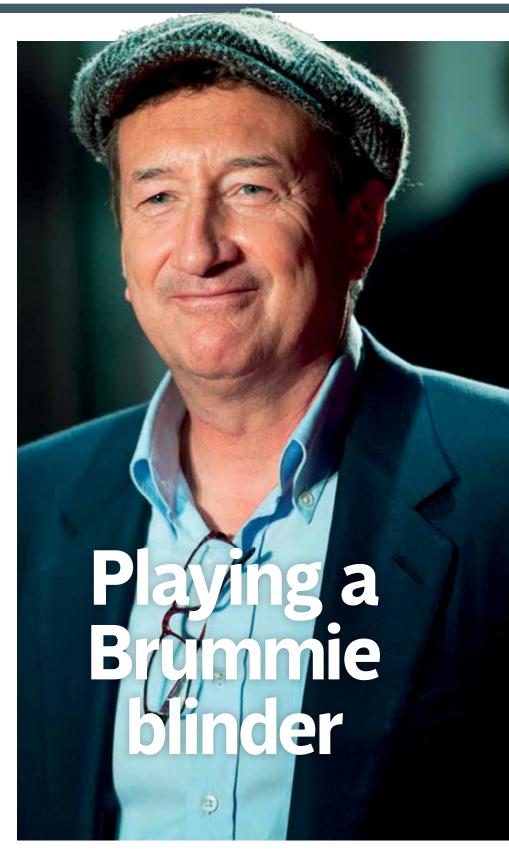
We meet shortly before Knight's *Peaky Blinders* begins its fifth season on BBC One. It advertises the writer's knack of finding the drama in stories – gangsters from Birmingham! – that no one else even saw as stories.

Over 30 episodes it has grown into an epic. BBC viewers, initially confused, were given time to adjust to its heightened style, and Netflix viewers all over the world have followed them. It is an example of how co-productions work best: the BBC, says Knight, leaves him alone and the US cable channel FX digs into its deep pockets.

Peaky also unlocks the door that leads to the slightly mysterious Steven Knight. He was born 60 years ago in a little village in Wiltshire, to which his blacksmith father, George Knight, had moved when his time shoeing Co-op delivery horses ended. Three months after Steven was born, the country blacksmith's business also foundered, and the Knight family – of which Steven was the seventh child – moved back to its roots in Small Heath, southeast Birmingham.

For a while, George, the son of a canal boatman, worked with his brothers in the local car factories. But then, with a mobile forge, he started to shoe horses again in riding stables around the city – and in scrap merchants' yards.

"I used to go in there as a kid and you would see the *Peaky Blinders* world," says Knight, who is sitting opposite me in the Soho Hotel in London. We are a few feet from where he first met the actor



Tom Hardy, star of his film *Locke* and his later BBC series *Taboo*.

"It was full of the last remnants of what Birmingham used to be: stolen stuff, scrap, all kinds of things. It was like an Aladdin's cave. As my dad shoed the horses, I'd hear them talking. There was Charlie Strong, who I've used in the series, and Curly, who was my great, great uncle. Very, very funny people. It was that flavour of the last of the old Birmingham that I tried to put into *Peaky*."

Set in the 1920s, *Peaky Blinders* is named after a real gang run by the Sheldon family (on legal advice, they became Shelby in the series). In his childhood, Steven's father knew these gangsters as his uncles. One day, delivering a message, he knocked on a door and found eight men seated around a table piled with their earnings as illegal bookies.

"He said they were immaculately dressed. Razor blades, guns, drinking beer and whisky out of jam jars."

Traditionally, says Knight, British TV dramas make working-class people objects of pity. *Blinders*, instead, romanticises the local legend of these men, much as Westerns mythologised American ranchers. The sharp suits that

**SOON, WE** 

**SHALL SEE** 

**IOSTLING** 

**BLINDERS** 

**SUITS'** 

THE STREETS

**WITH PEAKY** 

Knight's anti-heroes wear are historically accurate, however.
"From a certain background, wealth is not a number in a bank account but what you're wearing that people can see," he maintains.

The *Blinders* cropped their hair close at the back and sides, the way it had been cut in the trenches of France in order to combat lice

(beneath their caps, the hair grew as its owners wished). At first, the *Blinders* male cast members complained but, before they knew it, every man under a certain age and with a certain vanity about him was asking for a *Peaky Blinders* haircuit

Now, it's the British man's default hairstyle. Soon, we shall see the streets jostling with *Peaky Blinders* suits, too: Knight is starting a high-quality clothes line, all-British cloth and all-British craftsmen. "I want it to reflect the standard of the series," he says.

His canny sartorial entrepreneurship here, however, is nothing to what Birmingham is about to see from him. Knight plans to build massive studio complexes in Digbeth, in the centre of the city, and near the National Exhibition Centre – six sound stages in all, with three TV studios in Digbeth, initially.

He discerned a gap in the market when he was making his 2016 Brad Pitt film, *Allied*, and could not find studio space. "I noticed that there was a hole in the middle of the country in terms of production." With HS2 set to cut journey times from London to 48 minutes, he found huge interest from financiers, producers and the West Midlands mayor, Andy Street.

"Everybody wants to come to the UK, partly because the best crews and the acting talent are here. This is a place where the infrastructure works. There's a 20% tax break for overseas film-makers, which helps, too. Even though there are other territories with bigger tax breaks, Britain still attracts people. More often than not, it's the talent, the actors, who choose the venue for making the [production]."

"Digbeth reminds me of Tribeca before it became Tribeca. There's a lot of big Victorian warehouses, a lot of them unused, derelict factories, warehousing space, canal architecture. It's

beautiful."

One deal has been signed, the other is about to be. I ask if a writer has ever run a studio before, and he thinks not.

What we have here, I realise, is an original thinker whose ideas cannot be limited by job description. It was his talent as a writer that was noticed first, however, when he was

10 or 11. At that stage, his ambition was simply to work in an office because no one he knew did. By the time he, the first of his family in higher education, went to university in London, he knew he wanted to be a writer.

When he left, he went back to Birmingham to work for an ad agency making radio commercials and then down to London to work as a copywriter and producer at Capital Radio. He began writing for Jasper Carrott on Canned Carrott and the police procedural spoof The Detectives. He also devised a "not very good" boardgame called PSI (for Psychology, Slander, Intuition), which became a little-remembered gameshow hosted by Chris Tarrant.

Then, in the late 1990s, with his writing partner, Mike Whitehill, and David Briggs, he invented another one, which would also be hosted by Capital's Tarrant. This was *Who Wants To Be a Milliongire?* 

He recalls: "No one would insure it! At first, it was an unlimited prize. Someone could keep going for ever. That's what scared them. And when they said it's got to have a limit, we said it's got to be a big limit. A million was the obvious thing, I suppose." And it supplied them with an obvious title.

At the time, he was also writing >

# Knight's ride

Steven Knight, writer, director, producer

**Married** With three children **Lives** Gloucestershire and Nottingham

**Born** 5 August 1959, in Wiltshire, but brought up in Birmingham; seventh child of George and Ida Knight

Education University College, London (BA Hons, English) 1984-87 Writer and producer,

Capital Radio

1990 Starts writing for TV: Canned

Carrott, The Detectives, The Ruby Wax Show

**1998** Co-creates Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?

**2002** *Dirty Pretty Things*, for which he receives an Oscar nomination

2006 Amazing Grace

**2013** Writes and directs Hummingbird

**2013** *Peaky Blinders* launches on BBC Two

**2013** Writes and directs *Locke*, starring Tom Hardy

**2017** *Taboo*, also with Tom Hardy, launches on BBC One

2019 See set to air on Apple TV+

**Hits** Millionaire, Dirty Pretty Things, Locke, Peaky Blinders **Flop** 2019 movie Serenity

Hobbies Fishing and 'lighting fires' Listening Dylan, Leonard Cohen Watching 'I hear Killing Eve is really good. I just don't really get into a situation where I can sit down and watch things'

On Tom Hardy: 'A lot of people are very scared of him. For good reason. But he's great. I mean, he's very complex but he's brilliant'

On screenwriting in the SVoD era: 'Parents should be saying, "Don't be an architect. Don't be a lawyer. Become a screenwriter. That's where the money is."



In novels for Penguin. He was on his fourth, "telling it, for some reason, in the present tense", when he realised that he was actually writing a screenplay for a movie (his third). Stephen Frears agreed to direct it, asking only for a "better ending".

"That was it, all he said. I mean, it spoilt me for ever. I thought that was what all meetings with directors would be like."

The thriller *Dirty Pretty Things*, set among asylum seekers and illegal immigrants, won Knight an Academy Award nomination for best original screenplay and a ton of prizes. Fourteen films have followed – he made his debut as a director on *Hummingbird* in 2013 – and their range, from war movie to romance through the oneman drama *Locke*, is unusually wide.

Yet his last, released this year, *Serenity*, was savaged by critics. How does he feel when that happens? "I don't care. I mean, I do care. I care on behalf of other people that are involved.

"But, to be honest, what things such as *Peaky* have taught me is that if, for example, *Serenity* had been an eighthour returning serial, by hour eight people would have got it. What's incredible to me is that the response from people whose opinion I really respect was fantastic.

"They have to market it in a

particular way. And they marketed it as a noirish thriller, which it starts out as, but that's meant to be the trick. That's the joke. It's not that. Then you find out what it really is.

"I really dislike the concept of genre, where you say, 'This is this way of looking at life', as opposed to mixing it up. I mean, you never get up in the morning and have a comedy day or a drama day. You have everything: comedy, drama, tragedy, all of it."

One can assume, nevertheless, that Knight has his family days, since he is married with three children – but he has never talked about his domestic life to the press. "I just don't think it's a good idea. I spend a lot of time around famous people and it's so wonderful not to be famous. It's just blissful, because they have a hard, hard life [of scrutiny]."

For someone in favour of mixing things up, it is natural that he should be contributing to the latest of what we now call the "disruptors", Apple TV+. The service launches this autumn with Knight's latest series, *See.* Starring Jason Momoa and Sylvia Hoeks, it is set 550 years into the future, and 500 years after a virus robbed mankind of the power of sight.

"The series begins when two twins are born and they can see." The first run of eight has been filmed in Vancouver, and Knight has written the second season.

Could he have taken it to the BBC? "The problem with the BBC is that you have to be realistic about what you can achieve with the budget. This is a big-budget thing."

Is it aimed at the British market? "The world. What Apple is saying is: 'We will put this programme on a billion screens at the same time, on the same day, all over the world."

So, it is a throwback in a way to the old idea of a big launch and episodic transmissions? "I'm hoping that this is how it's going to transpire. There's been a lot of talk of going back to scheduled broadcasting, because the value of it is that everybody sees it at the same time and talks about it. Then you can all watch it separately, but having that time and date."

We won't be able to binge-watch it all on the first night? "I hope not. I've heard that the plan is not to do that."

Knight, although his hair is not cut particularly close at the temples, does not look like a 60-year-old. Nor does he talk like a grizzled, cynical veteran of this business — or businesses in his case. "I've been working with Ridley Scott and he's 80. There's no suggestion that he's going to stop any time soon," he says. "For me, it's all just started. Seriously."



n 10 June, the licence fee time bomb – primed by Chancellor Gordon Brown and set ticking by his successor George Osborne – duly exploded, as forecast back in February's *Television*\*.

By granting the over-75s a free TV licence (Brown) and then transferring the cost and responsibility from the government to the BBC (Osborne), the two chancellors locked the corporation in a no-win situation. Claire Enders, of Enders Analysis, argues that the deal was "illegitimate" and never affordable: "It was a lose-lose for the BBC, its viewers and listeners."

Had the BBC taken over the full cost of the free licences, this would have cost it £745m a year — rising to £1bn a year in the next decade, as the over-75 population grew. The corporation said this was a fifth of its budget, equal to the cost of running BBC Two, BBC Three, BBC Four, the BBC News channel, CBBC and

# **BBC** finance

# Torin Douglas reveals how the row over free licences for the elderly is weighing on the corporation

CBeebies. When sceptics accused it of "shroud-waving", the broadcaster pointed to the figures set out in its annual report.

But if the corporation decided not to pick up the whole bill, and chose a lesser option, it would then be accused of reneging on its agreement with the government. Which is exactly what happened when it announced its decision on 10 June.

From June 2020, the BBC will pay for the licences of only the poorest over-75s, those in receipt of pensions credit. They account for just over a quarter of the current recipients and will cost the BBC £250m a year.

"This has not been an easy decision," says Director-General Tony Hall. "I believe we have reached the fairest judgement after weighing up all the different arguments. It would not be right simply to abolish all free licences.

"Equally, it would not be right to maintain them in perpetuity, given the very profound impact that would have on many BBC services."

The resulting explosions, in Westminster and on front pages, were every bit as loud as one would expect, despite the BBC's efforts to muffle the blasts with mounds of economic reports and surveys.

The broadcaster's consultation paper had invited licence-payers and stakeholders to comment on a range of options: keeping the current >

\* 'BBC faces free-fee quandary', Television, February 2019 concession; removing it entirely; discounting the fee; raising the age threshold to 80; or giving a free TV licence to any household where someone is over 75 and receives pension credit.

There were 190,000 responses – linking the free licence to pension credit was the leading option for reform.

All to little avail. Critics – including pensioners' groups, politicians and former BBC personalities – accused the corporation of going back on its word.

In the *Spectator*, Toby Young said he had good reason to believe that

the bill would be picked up by the BBC: "According to the BBC News website, dated 6 July 2015, the Beeb would 'cover the cost of providing free TV licences for over-75s' and 'in return... the licence fee will rise with inflation'.

"But on Monday the BBC announced that it would not be paying for this after all, even though the licence fee went up in line with inflation in 2017 – for the first time since 2010 – then again in 2018, and again this year."

Young continued: "The odd thing is that [Hall] boasted in 2015 about what a good deal he'd negotiated — and that included the commitment to providing free TV licences to everyone over 75. 'Far from being a cut, the way that this financial settlement is shaped gives us, effectively, flat licence-fee income across the first five years of the next Charter,' he said. 'If anything, I believe it will put the BBC slightly up.'"

Supporters of the BBC, such as Voice of the Listener & Viewer (VLV), said it was a mistake for the corporation to take on responsibility for a policy relating to a welfare benefit.

The group has long wondered why the broadcaster put such a brave face on the deal and why the Director-General and members of the BBC Trust did not resign (or even threaten to) when Osborne bounced the corporation into paying for the free licences. A previous Director-General, Mark Thompson, threatened to resign when the Chancellor first tried the move in 2010.

One BBC Trustee has now explained what happened. At the VLV conference in May, Richard Ayre said that culture secretary John Whittingdale MP had rung the BBC Chair, Rona Fairhead, and told her that the Chancellor had

decided the BBC would now take responsibility for the payment for over-75s; that he would announce it two days later; and that [the Government] required the BBC to give its formal agreement within two hours.

"Needless to say, they refused," said Ayre, and, after "a series of frenetic

**'AN OUTCRY** 

WAS

**INEVITABLE.** 

WHATEVER

THE BBC DID'

discussions with DCMS and the Treasury, there were concessions. The transfer would not be immediate but would take place over five years; top slicing would end (the BBC had had to fund the roll-out of high-speed broadband); people who only accessed BBC content

through the iPlayer would have to pay a licence fee (a very significant gain for the BBC); and the licence fee for the next five years would be linked to inflation, having been flat for the previous two licence-fee settlements."

Ayre confirmed that some Trustees had discussed resigning. "But we were eight weeks away from the start of formal talks about the next BBC Charter," he recounted. "Had we resigned, there would be no Trust in place for the first five months of the Charter negotiations, no representative of the licence-fee payer.

"Even worse, if we resigned, the Government might have used an order in council to suspend that part of the Charter relating to the Trust and asked Ofcom to take over responsibility for the BBC. That's why we didn't resign. I leave it to you and others to decide whether we were right or not."

Right or not, we are where we are. And since 10 June things have not gone well for the BBC. To stretch the analogy, the licence-fee time-bomb is now more like a monstrous string of firecrackers that continues to detonate.

On 2 July, the BBC revealed a big uplift for women presenters in the section of its annual report detailing pay for talent and staff. Good news? No: "BBC gives stars £11m pay rise as it cuts free TV licences" was the splash in the *Daily Telegraph*. Its leading article argued that "BBC salaries come at pensioners' expense".

"BBC's new kick in the teeth for over-75s," trumpeted the *Daily Mail*. "They're axing free pensioner licences. But latest wage bill soars to £1.5bn." Over four more pages, it listed the top 73 BBC earners, under the headline,



"So much for 'struggling' BBC", alongside a coruscating article by "an outraged ex-BBC stalwart" – former war reporter Martin Bell.

Downing Street asked why the BBC wasn't showing more restraint over pay. BBC Chair Sir David Clementi responded, dismissing the idea that cutting stars' pay would allow all over-75s to have free licences. Capping salaries at £150,000 would save only £20m of the £745m, he said. "The sums don't add up."

The charity Age UK continues to demand that the government – not the BBC – should pay for the free licences. It points out that the take-up of pension credit is low, and it fears the new system may cause chaos and be deeply upsetting to older people.

It lobbied the Conservative



leadership candidates to keep the party's manifesto promise to fund the free licences until 2022. The organisation recruited stars such as Dame Helen Mirren and Sir Lenny Henry to its 'Switched Off' campaign, and its petition has secured more than 600,000 signatures. Despite this, most newspapers kept the heat on the BBC, and so did politicians.

Two weeks after the annual report, Hall gave evidence on the issue to MPs on the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, in what the *Telegraph* called "an often bad-tempered appearance" and the *Times* called "heated". Again, he was forced to deny that the BBC was going back on its agreement with the government, saying, "I really refute that and I really resent that."

He insisted that there was a

difference between paying for the free licences and taking responsibility for (and deciding) the policy. "As part of the settlement in 2015, it was clear that reform of the over-75s issue was on the table and everybody knew that reform was likely. Not inevitable, but likely," he said.

More negative headlines followed, and Will Wyatt, former Chief Executive of BBC Broadcast, laments that they won't be the last, as the new scheme goes forward and licence prosecutions continue.

"An outcry was inevitable, whatever the BBC did, and I don't think the corporation has handled it badly," he says. "Although it has taken the brunt of this, there has been recognition by Age UK and others that the government is the wicked fairy here — but I don't think this will help. I don't see any chancellor taking the burden back on the public finances."

VLV Chair Colin Browne believes that the most important thing now is to make sure future licence-fee settlements are never again agreed in secret. He is pleased that the BBC has called for serious consideration of VLV's suggestion to parliament that a statutory commission be established to set the level of the licence fee in the future.

Hall told the MPs: "The last two settlements have been made in the dark and without proper consultation. It is vital that future decisions are evidence-based and made after proper consultation and scrutiny. We need to find a better way."

Meanwhile, it must still deal with the fallout from the last settlement. ■

on't expect Linda Yaccarino to be intimidated by Facebook or Google or any of the other silicon Valley behemoths. This highly experienced US media executive is renowned for her tough negotiating skills and ubercompetitiveness. Not for nothing is the NBCUniversal executive, who reports directly to Comcast chief Steve Burke, known among Manhattan media types as the Velvet Hammer.

The RTS Canbridge speaker once featured as the cover story of US trade paper *AdWeek* under the headline "Wonder woman". But, arguably, it is her ability to successfully identify and negotiate change that has secured her reputation as one of the 10 most powerful women in US TV.

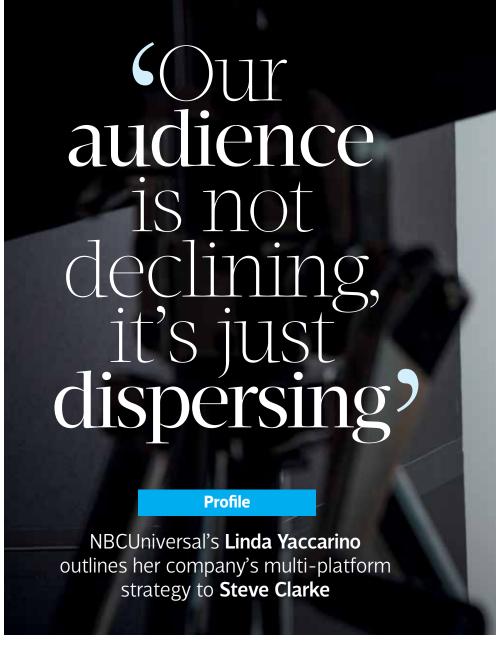
"Linda has the ability to stay a step ahead, and I think she's done that wherever she's been," says Julie Rieger, until recently executive vice-president for media at 20th Century Fox, who has known Yaccarino for more than a decade.

On her watch, NBCU has introduced the new advertising metric CFlight in order to better measure all-screen viewing. She is helping to lead the charge as NBCU prepares to launch its eagerly anticipated hybrid streaming service that will carry advertising and be available for free to Comcast and Sky subscribers. There will also be an ad-free version for other subscribers.

Yaccarino, 55, is responsible for the advertising sales and marketing strategy of NBCU's entire TV portfolio, which includes two broadcast, 17 cable and in excess of 50 digital properties. Taken together, these services generate more than \$10bn of advertising revenue. During her stewardship, NBCU's digital advertising business has grown in value to more than \$1bn per year.

Her role goes beyond sales to embrace oversight of advanced technology, insights and measurement, business marketing and monetisation teams.

Yaccarino began working at NBC-Universal eight years ago. Before that, she ran ad sales for Turner Broadcasting. She spent almost two decades at the company founded by the maverick Ted Turner, who once said: "Life is a



game. Money is how we keep score." The man who revolutionised TV news by founding CNN was a seminal role model for the young Yaccarino.

"I started out at Turner," Yaccarino told *Television*. "I would say that the culture at the time put a heavy emphasis on boldness. We didn't have as much data or technology, so we had to rely on our own conviction and confidence.

"And there is no one who did that better than Ted Turner. He was a tremendous influence on my career, and I carry a lot of what I learnt from him with me today."

Arriving at NBCU in 2011, she found a very different company to the present one. "The first year at NBCUniversal was the hardest year I have ever had in my entire career," she once said. "I was hired to come and head up an entire sales and marketing department. But I was also hired to transform the company."

True to her word, this single-minded media executive set about modernising NBCU's advertising operation. Initially, she oversaw cable and digital sales but, within two years, was promoted to lead all cable and broadcast networks, which she brought together under a single portfolio. *AdWeek* described the move as a "then-revolutionary shake-up that was eventually adopted by almost all of her competitors".

Determined to break down the silo mentality she found at the company and replace it with a more collaborative working culture, she made sweeping changes. "I was hired to transform



# Progress for women at work

Linda Yaccarino: 'There's never been a better time to be a woman in our industry. Women are getting more and more opportunities behind and in front of the camera.

'For our part at NBCUniversal, we're doing a few things to make sure that we make our workforce and hiring practices more inclusive: we're offering more flexible work arrangements to accommodate two-parent households. We're training our HR department on how to write neutral job descriptions.

'And we're also piloting 'blind resumes', which have already increased interviews for female candidates in technology by 50%.

'While there's definitely more of an awareness surrounding the challenges women face when it comes to getting ahead, we still have a lot of work to do.'

# What she's watching

'I love This Is Us and Keeping up with the Kardashians, but I'm biased. As for British shows, I am a big Downton Abbey fan, and am so excited that our company is putting out the movie this fall. Very excited to see how the Crawleys are doing.'

the company and it didn't matter if I was ready or not," Yaccarino has said.

Today, her teams span both sides of the Atlantic, following the successful bid for Sky last year by Comcast (NBCU's parent company). She is overseeing a new international advertising and partnership team. This involves building the ad technology infrastructure to enable Comcast, NBCU and Sky to operate what NBCU describes as the world's first global, premium advertising operation.

At NBCU, she has secured partnerships with such non-traditional players as Apple News, Snapchat, BuzzFeed and YouTube.

What is her secret for being such an effective manager? "I think, when you are talking about such a complex

organisation, being an effective manager has meant forging effective partnerships. And that's true internally and externally.... But we also sit at the intersection of so many different parts of our company, helping bridge this huge portfolio of networks and creatives, who make such great content, with the technology and data we need to measure that content, and to distribute that portfolio to audiences all over the world.

"And that means building relationships and trust with a lot of different people, and showing them how we can help them achieve their goals."

Sharply turned out (she admits to a "mild" fashion addiction) and a fluent talker who avoids the kind of jargon often associated with advertising executives, she is a regular speaker at

international media gatherings. Earlier this year, she spoke at the World Economic Forum.

What can Cambridge delegates expect from her? "Well, as they say, I'm not going to give away any spoilers. But you can expect an inside look at how NBCUniversal views globalisation. While the idea of globalisation is not new to NBCU, over the past year that view has started to assert itself with three enormous and new efforts."

Asked what her key focus right now is, she replies: "Transformation. Companies need to think about how they fit into this rapidly changing world, and how they build for the future. At NBCUniversal, that has meant taking a global view, and investing in the best content, data, and distribution there is. >

> "Already, we've got rid of legacy processes, built alternatives to legacy measurement, and embraced innovation at every level. Really, if you're serious about future-proofing your business, you can't just make a few tweaks. You have to be serious about transformation."

One key challenge facing companies such as NBCU is how to grow ad revenue in an on-demand world.

What is the answer? "First off, I think there's an opportunity because this on-demand world makes so much of our inventory more valuable. People are no longer surfing channels, they are making choices.

"When someone chooses to watch one show out of the hundreds of good shows out there that means that they really care. Some companies see that and are moving away from the ad-supported model.

"But, while other companies are pushing advertisers out, we're inviting them in. No matter what happens, brands are always going to need a place to tell people there's a new menu item or a new model or a new movie.

"And the places where you can do that – safely, smartly and at scale – are few and far between. In short, I think it can grow because this ondemand world has made our audiences more engaged, our inventory more valuable and these scaled opportunities more scarce."

Two years ago, she said: "The next frontier is: How do we really bring it all together in terms of linear and digital?"

In that context, where is NBCU now? "Well, you might have heard, but we just had our first – and the industry's first – all-screen Upfront. After bringing the company together as one portfolio, and investing in a new measurement [system] that captures consumer behaviour across all screens – CFlight – we have finally brought together and sold our content across all screens. This was a massive effort, and our clients get it.

"They know how consumers work, so we saw 100% adoption of that all-screen measurement in this Upfront. It has been adopted by Sky. Other companies are now following our lead, such as Viacom. Of course, more of the industry can still adopt this all-screen approach, but, at NBCUniversal, we are proud to be leading the way."



# NBCU's new streaming service

For Comcast and Sky subscribers, NBCU's new streaming service will be free – and ad supported – but isn't one reason that streaming services are so popular is that they don't carry ads?

Linda Yaccarino: It's not that consumers won't tolerate ads. It's that they won't tolerate intrusive ads, incessant ads or ads that are

just bad. Great ads are another story. Great ads get remembered right alongside the shows we all love.

The data is clear and it's consistent, that people are good with the right amount of content in exchange for relevant ads. If you don't overwhelm people with ads, and the ads are interesting, people will watch ads and then write you a cheque.

# Why ads need to get smarter still

You've been a pioneer of personalised ads, with commercials tied to specific scenes – but are broadcasters really doing enough in this area?

Linda Yaccarino: We're just beginning to see companies really invest in technology and explore the possibility of personalised and contextually relevant ads. But there is still a lot of untapped potential.

At NBCUniversal, we've been developing contextual intelligence,

which uses our proprietary AI to read the scripts of shows and commercials and make connections across the portfolio. And addressability continues to improve, especially as we've come together with Sky to offer AdSmart.

And I think we'll see more — it's exactly the kind of innovative solution that combines the best of what technology offers, and how stories affect us. I have no doubt that it will define the future of advertising.

# The future of free-to-air

What's the future for ad-funded, free-to-air networks – is it about managing decline in an on-demand world?

Linda Yaccarino: First off, I don't think you need to manage decline because our audience isn't declining. Sure, if you only measured the viewers who are watching shows on their TVs, precisely when a show airs, then you would see decline.

But we all know that's not how people watch today.

When you really measure everyone who's watching our shows — when you count the people who watch on their tablets and phones, the people who watch on different platforms a week or even a few months later — a very different picture emerges. Our audience isn't declining; it's just dispersing.

# EAST ANGLIA

ive, four, three, two, one – roll titles...
Chris, we're on air,
22 minutes to you."
I'll always remember the first time I heard that little voice in my ear during live TV. The rush of adrenaline and the buzz of energy that happened then, and still happens to this very day, whether I'm on location or in the studio.

I grew up in the "Fine City". It's not just me that calls it that, the road sign as you enter Norwich proclaims it, too. As a child, I spent many summer evenings learning to sail and kayak with a local scout group on the Norfolk Broads.

But I never imagined that one day I'd become the weatherman for the local TV channel I'd grown up with – ITV Anglia.

I've always loved the weather, ever since building my first rain gauge with my dad when I was six. But it wasn't until high school that my passion for physical geography developed. I graduated from the University of Reading in 2012, joined the Met Office in Exeter and qualified as a meteorologist, before moving to ITV Anglia in December 2017.

Since then, it's been a huge learning curve. In the first few weeks on the job there was the "Beast from the East", followed by the record-breaking summer of 2018. And it never stops. As I write, the highest temperature ever recorded in the UK has just been confirmed in Cambridge.

The weather is something we Brits talk about all the time. We love it. And,

Weathermen
require a cool head
- especially when
hanging from a
zip wire, says
Chris Page



as much as I love being in the comfort of the studio during the boiling hot summers and the freezing cold winters, you can't beat facing the elements with an outside broadcast. I am a geographer, after all.

Now, contrary to belief, there is no script with weather presenting. Everything is done "on the fly". Unlike a newsreader, when we look at the camera there is no autocue, all we see is ourselves in front of the map.

But when we're on location we don't even get that. There is no heads up from the graphics, everything has to be done from memory. It's just you, the camera and that little voice in your ear counting down to zero.

You're just praying the graphics are in time with you.

I've been lucky with my work to visit some stunning places in East Anglia. Firm favourites include the endless Cambridgeshire skies, the Norfolk Broads and the picturesque coastline of our eastern counties – perfect backdrops for doing live weather.

I try to bring something different to my outside broadcasts and, being at the end of the programme, we're able to have a softer, "fun" approach.

So I've done mid-programme teasers on a zip wire, in the middle of an assault course, on a sailing boat, while ice skating and surrounded by lambs nibbling my jacket — although not all at the same time!

One outside broadcast that stands out was just before Christmas. A local garden centre went viral by allowing its customers to jump through a Christmas-tree-wrapping tunnel for charity.

I wasn't allowed a rehearsal, but I'd been watching others do it. All went fine until I put my hands out and was pulled through the tunnel. The netting acted like a boa constrictor and I was left ending the programme with a squished face and my arms above my head. Not my best moment, although the producers thought otherwise.

The beautiful Norfolk lavender fields are one of my favourite places to broadcast from. And on those days, surrounded by a sea of purple and a smell so potent you can taste it, I realise how fortunate I am to work in the place that I call home.

Chris Page presents the weather for ITV Anglia.



# Online content comes of age

here's a long-standing TV industry conception that online original content is too low in quality, too niche and too difficult to make profitable. But that view is starting to look obsolete thanks to inventive digital-first companies such as Barcroft Studios, Little Dot Studios and others. Successful business models for premium online content are emerging as both profits and awards start to roll in.

Clearer business models have also raised interest in these companies: in March, Barcroft Studios appointed Deloitte to look at a potential buyout of the award-winning business, founded by Sam Barcroft in 2003. Companies reportedly kicking Barcroft's tyres inc-

# Web TV

Kate Bulkley discovers how digital-first players such as Barcroft Media and Little Dot Studios are making money and gaining kudos lude ITV, All3Media and EndemolShine.

Little Dot Studio's owner, All3Media, confirms that the company it spun out six years ago is on track to become profitable, and its turnover is expected to pass £30m this year.

Camden-based Moonbug Entertainment raised \$145m shortly after its creation last year to fund its acquisition and original content production plans. Moonbug's first purchase was the YouTube hit channel Little Baby Bum, from which it has created a new brand, Buster the Bus.

These success stories notwithstanding, the road to success in online content creation and distribution is far from straightforward. Taking their lead from Silicon Valley's playbook, the entrepreneurs behind these companies

have a "test-and-learn" approach to what content works.

Careful analysis of a number of metrics, including engagement and viewing time, is crucial. Success also requires understanding the changing algorithms of platforms such as YouTube and being willing to build what Barcroft calls a "portfolio approach". In other words, find multiple routes to monetisation, such as brand partnerships and even selling show-branded merchandise direct from the online channels.

From the outset, Barcroft Studios has created original, factual content. Its journalists look for real stories for online audiences. But making money from premium factual content online, even with standout stories, is not easy.

Barcroft admits that, as recently as three years ago, he considered making videos of "cats falling off logs and hitting their heads" to help bridge the financial gap. But today, with some 2,500 original films being exploited on Barcroft's advertising-supported, on-demand platforms, his bet on premium original content is paying off.

"In the beginning, we were making money by using the internet as an incubator for talent and ideas and brands," he explains. "We would make shows and use that catalogue to pitch to TV commissioners and brands with some data around them." Now, with more than 15 million followers of its online shows and up to 1 billion views a month for its original content, the company has "reached scale".

Last month, Barcroft Studios won Best Original Web Channel at the 2019 Broadcast Digital Awards. In commending Barcroft TV, a YouTube originals channel with 6.9 million subscribers, the jurors highlighted the true-crime series *Chasing Justice*, style show *Share the Hair* and the *Truly* strand, with its two-part documentary about snakehandling American pastors.

Recent changes in the online ecosystem – particularly the emergence of new advertising-funded distribution platforms such as Facebook Watch, Snapchat's Discover and Instagram TV – have extended the monetisation opportunities beyond YouTube.

"Online content creation and distribution is a very fluid market place," says Alex DeGroote, senior advisor at consultancy Trillium Partners.
"Embracing YouTube and Facebook is well understood because of Gen Z and younger audiences. However, monetisation is not straightforward, mainly

because of revenue share, but other platforms beyond YouTube are also garnering significant audiences.

"For example, the time spent watching shows on Snapchat every day has more than tripled in 12 months."

For online content producers and distributors these changes are significant: "The tipping point for us came half way through 2018, when Facebook

# 'FIND MULTIPLE ROUTES TO MONETISATION, SUCH AS... SELLING MERCHANDISE'

and Snap opened up their Watch and Discover programmes to partnerships," says Barcroft. "For us, this is just a better economic model than an opensource model such as YouTube, especially with all the challenges around brand safety."

Barcroft Studios has eight returning series on Snap's Discover and 15 on Facebook Watch. These are by far the biggest revenue streams for the company's original content. "And they are the same shows," emphasises Barcroft. "They live on both platforms, but with a different edit and with some different windowing."

Last year, seven of Barcroft's digital brands, including *Born Different*, were sold to broadcasters, including Australia's Channel 7 and Animal Planet in the US. "It's a portfolio approach because we already own the IP, so it's about getting a team to re-cut them for a TV audience," explains Barcroft.

Little Dot Studio's model is based on helping clients such as ITV and Disney, and sport rights owners such as the England and Wales Cricket Board and the Football Association, to build and leverage online communities using their archive and catch-up TV content.

"Once we've built a strong community we look to produce original content as well," says Andy Taylor, co-founder and CEO of Little Dot Studios. "For many clients, we also perform media buying on YouTube and Facebook to help market their new shows or to push SVoD or [contribute to] merchandising and licensing. In the US, our media-buying activities are

much bigger. UK broadcasters have been much slower to promote their shows on social platforms, but it will inevitably happen."

Little Dot moved into own-branded YouTube channels more than two years ago. Its 10-strong data science team helps assess whether there is enough demand to support a channel. The company then licenses premium content from producers and content owners to create online channels such as Real Stories, which licenses one-hour docs. One of these originals was *Missed Call*, the Short Form Programme winner at the 2019 Bafta Television Awards. Real Stories has 2.6 million subscribers and often gets more than 500,000 views a day.

Taylor admits that the profitability of its 20 YouTube channels is not always clear cut. And some don't work at all: Reveal, a health and beauty-focused YouTube channel launched by Little Dot nine months ago, failed to gain traction.

"People aren't searching for it. We plan to switch it off soon," says Taylor. "Even the economics of a documentary such as *Missed Call* on an incredibly successful YouTube channel and Facebook page doesn't stack up unless you can exploit it beyond Facebook and YouTube. But we have made other shows, including one about tattoos that has had over 10 million views. It paid for itself five times over."

Taylor calls the key to original production online the "Why?" factor. "I always ask my team: 'Why are we doing this? Will it win an award? Will it turn Jay Hunt's head so that we can maybe get an Apple commission? Or, will it get us 10 million views?'

"If the team can't answer at least one of those questions with a 'Yes' then it doesn't get green-lit."

While the online world is driven by the ambitions and strategies of the tech giants, new opportunities continue to present themselves. In June, for example, the Barcroft Animals YouTube channel began selling *Dog Dynasty*-branded hoodies and T-shirts.

"We're not a retailer, so maybe this will never be a core part of our business," says Barcroft. "But building a solid relationship with digital viewers is something that all the Faangs (Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google) are super excited about. We have 50 million followers across our online shows — so, if we were a retailer, it would be a pretty good base."

Interview

# The rise and rise of David Gyasi

# The actor describes to **Ben Dowell** what happened when he finally landed a leading part

t was spring 2014. Actor David Gyasi had just landed his first lead role, playing special agent Marcus "Ash" Ashton in the action-packed BBC One drama series The Interceptor.

He had appeared in major dramas before, most notably playing Victor, a Jamaican scholarship student turned civil-rights lawyer in White Heat, Paula Milne's BBC Two saga. Gyasi had also enjoyed smallish film roles in movies such as Cloud Atlas and The Dark Knight Rises. But with The Interceptor he was to be the star, the eyes of the story, and there was to be a lot of derring-do.

Alas, two weeks into the shoot, something terrible happened.

"I was filming a scene where I was running across a car park and I felt like someone had kicked me in the back of my leg," Gyasi recalls. "I had ruptured my Achilles and I was unable to continue on the job."

It's the kind of thing that would get even the most stoical person down. But he was philosophical about the incident, helped, he says, by his Christian faith and the support of his wife (he met Emma, a dance teacher, while he was at sixth form) and their children.

"I am not sure I was fully gutted," he says. "I was interested in why that happened. I had spent a long time working towards this moment in my career and I have a faith and I am a Christian and I wondered what the meaning of this was. It definitely made my prayer time more raw and more truthful - and painfully honest."

The Interceptor, headed by his replacement, OT Fagbenle, bombed and lasted only one series. But getting that role proved something to him. A

working-class actor brought up in suburban Hillingdon by British-Ghanaian parents could, as he puts it, "break the glass ceiling".

A black actor who is not box ticking in an ensemble cast or playing "the best friend" to make the white characters look good or "nice" - no, his character was driving The Interceptor. That is what a lead role means to him - proper diversity in action.

Gyasi's composed attitude to his injury ultimately paid off. Exactly a year to the day it occurred, he started filming the lead role of Lex Carnahan in The CW drama Containment. The part had "the same level of responsibility" he'd been offered in The Interceptor. "And I was readier to take on that role and that responsibility," he adds.

Since then, he has starred in the BBC epic Troy: Fall of a City as Achilles (that heel again!), and, in August, he made his debut in Amazon's fantasy drama Carni-

# '[THE ACCIDENT] **DEFINITELY MADE MY PRAYER TIME... PAINFULLY HONEST'**

val Row. He plays Agreus, a faun who becomes mysteriously wealthy in the drama's beguiling world where humans and mythical creatures live side by side. He will be joining the cast of Peter Bowker's The A Word later this year.

Gyasi is 39 years old and very settled. But his current success seems a far cry from his early life, which sounds (even if he doesn't use the word) challenging. His father worked as a cab driver, his mother as a cook in office canteens. They both worked hard to provide opportunities for their six children.

Growing up in Hillingdon he experienced racism. There were some no-go areas. The moment when, as a 13-yearold, he saw the National Front newspaper, The Flag, being posted through his family's door was particularly raw. He still doesn't know why it was sent to their home

But he considers himself fortunate to have had a number of role models growing up. People who, as he puts it, looked like him. These included John Barnes on the football field – young David was soccer mad.

And after catching the drama bug early in his adolescence (Gyasi rather casually agreed to appear in a secondary school play and was dazzled by the experience), he looked to actors for inspiration: people such as Eamonn Walker and Idris Elba. He first saw Elba in the Channel 5 soap Family Affairs.

"These actors looked a certain way as well. They looked clean cut, they looked sharp, they had authority and responsibility within the pieces they

were doing.

"Idris was a good-looking guy doing so well and he had been given a bit of responsibility in a soap. That just landed in my head and I thought, 'Ah, that's nice to see'.

"That's when I started to entertain the idea of being an actor for a 40-year career, or for however long it goes. I clocked people who spoke like me and looked like me, as opposed to Americans who spoke a bit differently."

The presence of black faces on TV as he was growing up continues to make



him supportive of efforts to promote on-screen diversity. On the day we spoke there had been objections in some quarter of the internet to Halle Bailey (a black woman) voicing Disney's new Little Mermaid. But Gyasi believes these views need to be understood before being confronted and challenged.

"It really makes me smile, it's incredible... but you can't really blame these people. Because it's what we've shown them. We have told them this is what they look like, the beautiful people. And the hero usually has coiffed hair and looks like this and he comes along and saves the day.

"So we are in a process, saying, 'There's also this as well, the beautiful princess can look like this'. But I understand it, it's to do with what's gone before. When we started charging 5p for plastic carrier bags people were outraged, but it takes time.

"We now have that situation and the world has remained intact, it hasn't imploded. I hope that comes across with heart and grace. I understand why people react that way, but I think you have to be optimistic. I have kids. I have to stay in that optimistic camp."

Gyasi agrees that diversity is multifaceted, that it's not just about how you look, but who you are: it's just as important to have people from ethnic minorities as it is to have more state-educated people writing and appearing in TV shows. The key question, he says, comes back to perspective – who is driving the story on screen and who is behind the endeavour? Which returns us to the moment he broke the glass ceiling in 2014.

"In the US, I see producers that look like me and are different from the white, middle-class producers you tend to see in the UK. What's incredible when you begin to get diversity in the decision-making process is that you get to see other angles, different perspectives. And you get these scripts that are fuller and richer for it and more representative of the world in which we live.

"Overall, I think we sell ourselves short. If I leave my house now and do the things I have to do today I am going to meet a number of fascinating people with different stories and backgrounds.

"But if I say that today the only interesting person I spoke to is the middle-class gentleman I spoke to about his script, which I have, then I have sold myself so short. If I thought I should only take an interest in that one perspective, it's incredibly narrow."

But, above all, he would like one day to have a conversation where this subject isn't brought up in interviews: "This conversation is interesting but I would like us all to get to a stage where I just talk about the work.

"I see myself as a global citizen. I'm going to go where that script lands. And I'll do whatever is in my power to be on that job.

"But I don't know where that may be. There are so many interesting things out there."

Amen to that.

# **Power politics**

# **Stewart Purvis**

reveals how new documents illuminate the conflict between the media mogul and ex-prime minister

uring these past
12 months Rupert
Murdoch has been
only half the man in
the UK he used to be.
But that's only by one
measure – Ofcom's "share of references", which calculates which news
sources are consumed across different
media. It was a year ago, in September
2018, that the then 87-year-old's long
association with Sky came to an end.

When his new ally Disney was defeated in a bidding war by Comcast for the shares in BSkyB that 21st Century Fox did not already own, he left that particular field of battle with £11.6bn to regroup in the US. His News UK company still owns the *Times, Sunday Times* and *Sun* newspapers and Wireless Group. So one of the most successful figures in commercial media for at least the past three decades hasn't gone away – but the perception of his power is undoubtedly diminished.

Part of that perception has always been based on his access to British prime ministers, normally through the side or back door of 10 Downing Street, but on one memorable occasion, in 1995, a PM in waiting, Tony Blair, flew to a News Corporation conference in Australia. Murdoch joked that, if this flirtation were ever consummated, "Tony... I suspect we will end up making love like two porcupines – very, very carefully".

By contrast with the supportive Margaret Thatcher and the flirtatious Tony Blair, it is striking to see in Cabinet Office files for 1995, just released to the National Archives, what one of John Major's officials proposes as the "stop Murdoch" plan.

These documents give fascinating insights to a time when Major wanted the political support of the *Sun* and Murdoch wanted a clear regulatory run to launch digital satellite television.



FROM THE DIRECTOR GENERAL

14 July, 1995

## PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL

The Rt Hon John Major MP 10 Downing Street London SW1A 2AA BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION BROADCASTING ACKES SCHOOL WAS SAA TELEPHONE DITISED 4468 HISTORIAND AND CABLES BROADCASTS JORDON BIES JAKANS AND

# Dear Prime Minister,

We talked briefly over dinner with Norma and Jane about the impact on television of the digital revolution. I said I would write to you to set out some of the radical implications of this - most importantly the monopolistic position in this new digital world that <a href="Rupert Murdoch">Rupert Murdoch</a> is poised to win for himself, with hardly anyone seeming to appreciate his game plan.

What is the digital revolution?

It has two main characteristics:

- huge amounts of information whether picture, sound or datacan be compressed and sent down wires, including telephone wires, and over the airwaves
- unlike present-day broadcasting, communication in the digital era will be two-way: individual consumers will conduct transactions and receive specific programmes and information of their choice, at the moment they want, from anywhere in the world.

Cont.../

# Major and Murdoch's tug of war

In the 1993 files there were such details as Major deciding "to discourage cabinet ministers from attending Rupert Murdoch's 1 September jamboree". The aggressive mood in Downing Street was partly explained by the cuttings in the file, which chronicle the attacks in the columns of the *Sun*: "Dithering Major", "Pigmy PM", "not up to the job", "1,001 reasons why you are such a plonker John", "A broken man," "A discredited Prime Minister".

The then-editor of the *Sun*, Kelvin MacKenzie, said he once told Major on the phone, "I've got a large bucket of shit lying on my desk and tomorrow morning I'm going to pour it all over your head."

By 1995, two voices told Major all was not lost, that there was still a chance Murdoch might yet bring his papers back behind the Conservatives. One was a legendary Murdoch fixer, Lord (Woodrow) Wyatt, who had earlier been a key go-between for Margaret Thatcher. He wrote to Downing Street, informing them that Murdoch "is coming round pretty well and certainly does not want a Blair victory, despite his flirting in Australia".

John Major's then Press secretary, Christopher Meyer, later the British ambassador to Washington, copied Wyatt's note to the Prime Minister, adding that Murdoch's papers, having given "generous space to Blair, have started to hedge their bets".

If the unspoken implication of these messages was "careful you don't upset him too much on broadcasting matters", there was strong pushback from inside and outside Downing Street.

Major's private secretary for home affairs, Racheal Reynolds, put forward a cross-media plan to make sure "that the 20% limit on ownership of ITN should be enforced and that we should signal our intention to ensure open access to satellite and cable television (the 'stop Murdoch' plan)."

Reynolds, remembered by colleagues as "very feisty", also warned against policies that "would let the likes of Murdoch become even more powerful".

Reynolds' colleague in the Policy Unit Dominic Morris told Major that, unless they made digital terrestrial television a success, "Murdoch could eventually dominate British TV via satellite and his programmes on cable". Morris warned that "public-interest

broadcasting would be pushed into a ghetto".

A master of the accessible policy memo throughout a career that later took him to the BBC, ITC and Ofcom, Morris highlighted the importance of conditional access on digital satellite – and how Murdoch could not be allowed to have the "complete lock, which he had on analogue". He asked if the Prime Minister was "content"

# 'MAJOR... WAS DEEPLY HOSTILE TO MURDOCH, WHOSE PAPERS HAD BEEN MERCILESS'

with the above approach?" Major gave his approval by circling the word "content".

"The key battle is for control of the digital gateway into the home," argued one other person with direct access to Major, the Director-General of the BBC – John Birt.

We learnt from Birt's memoirs of a meeting with Major who "was deeply hostile to Murdoch, whose papers had been merciless at his expense". And how the PM "went on to despair about the growth of satellite and its impact on Britain... Why did the BBC have to collaborate with Sky on sport?"

What the archives now reveal is a letter Birt sent to Major in July 1995 following a dinner with their wives in which the BBC Director-General forecast, with great prescience, the digital revolution that lay ahead and asked "How can Murdoch be stopped?"

He wrote that the most important of the radical implications of the digital revolution was "the monopolistic position in this new digital world that Rupert Murdoch is poised to win for himself, with hardly anyone seeming to appreciator his game plan".

Had Murdoch or his senior executives seen the letter, they would probably observed the irony of what they saw as the head of a monopolistic BBC directly lobbying a PM who earlier had lobbied him not to co-operate on sport with BSkyB. In their mind, Birt and

Murdoch were doing the same thing, trying to develop new markets for their organisations.

All was now set for a meeting between Major and Murdoch on 13 September 1995. Press secretary Christopher Meyer said: "We want Murdoch to leave Downing Street convinced that Blair is going to have a real fight on his hands." Rachael Reynolds warned: "Just be aware if he says what a saviour he is."

There is no account of the actual meeting in the files, but that's not suspicious. About that time, I was invited to a one-to-one with Major in the Cabinet Room, where he asked what I would like the forthcoming legislation to say about the ownership of ITN. I told him and it duly became law. No record of that seems to exist either.

We can tell that Major wanted to keep lines of direct communication open to Murdoch because, when he wrote to him saying how much he had enjoyed their conversation, he sent a further invitation: "Norma and I would be delighted if you and Anna could come and have lunch one weekend at Chequers."

In 2016, Rupert Murdoch wrote to the *Guardian*, saying: "I have made it a principle all my life never to ask for anything from any prime minister." In these newly released files there is no evidence to disprove that. But perhaps he doesn't need to ask: politicians will have taken the trouble to find out what he wants and his executives can do any necessary asking for him.

For example, after the Murdoch meeting Major arranged for BSkyB's CEO, Sam Chisholm, to meet the head of his Policy Unit to discuss "encryption and technology".

Eventually, Major, following the advice of his Policy Unit and John Birt, imposed some regulatory controls on digital TV gatekeepers. But prime ministers can never forget that Murdoch's editors always have those large buckets on their desks.

Two years later, the *Sun* attacked Major's Government as "tired and divided" and proclaimed on the front page: "The *Sun* backs Blair."

Stewart Purvis is a former editor-in-chief and Chief Executive of ITN. He is currently a non-executive director of Channel 4 and writes here in a personal capacity.

# STEVE HEWLETT MEMORIAL LECTURE 2019

# 24 September



# Mark Thompson

President and CEO of The New York Times Company and a former Director-General of the BBC

University of Westminster, London W1W 7BY
6:00pm for 6:30pm
Drinks reception sponsored by BBC Studios

Booking: www.rts.org.uk

# RTS **NEWS**

# Pippa Shawley hears how to develop a hit show for television

t's important to be passionate, rather than possessive, about ideas when developing TV shows, an RTS Futures audience heard in July. "If you are defensive and precious about your idea, and you won't let it evolve, whether that's in your brainstorm or when you're pitching to the commissioner, it's just never going to go anywhere," explained Catherine Lynch, creative director at Initial TV, which makes ITV gameshow Tenable.

Initial's head of development, Kate Stannard, agreed: "What you end up seeing on telly is often quite different to the thing you first said in the room."

It's helpful to think of pitching as a conversation, suggested Damian Kavanagh, former controller of BBC Three and now Managing Director of Tiger Aspect, which makes BBC Three's Man Like Mobeen. Commissioners know what else they have in development, as well as what works best for their audience, so collaboration is vital.

The panel, chaired by BBC Studios director of digital content Anna Cronin, said it was crucial to have a strong sense of what the show would look like, why now was a good time to make it and why it would work on that channel.

Although the development process means the shape of the show is likely to change, it is still important to anticipate questions that commissioners might ask, and be ready with answers.

For Stannard, who has



# Getting the green light

worked on ITV's 5 Gold Rings and BBC One's Catchpoint, it's essential to think about the elements of a show: "My biggest development bugbear is when I read treatments and people say, 'And then they'll do some challenges....' What challenges? Be specific."

Presenting the treatment for the show is just as important as coming up with the idea. Thinking about what the show will look like on a channel's streaming service is a good start, suggested Kavanagh. "[The audience is] choosing on a picture and a line of copy — that's it. [You need] to crystallise your idea into that," he argued.

Stannard's team often opens pitches with a poster for the proposed show, which gives commissioners an idea of what the audience can expect.

Creatives working outside development must link up

with a development company before a commissioner will hear their ideas, the audience was told. Most companies won't read unsolicited emails in case they're accused of ripping off ideas, but they will often be open to meeting face to face.

Kavanagh advised looking up companies that have made similar shows: "Contact the development team, be aware of what the production company's doing, tell the people if you do, genuinely, like their work and would like to have a coffee."

'Development masterclass: From page to pitch' was held at RocketSpace in London on 9 July and was produced by Rajveer Sihota, Michael Fraser, Mars El Brogy and Melissa Clay-Peters.

# **CLARIFICATION**

# **David Harewood: Defying his demons**

Television, July/August 2019

David Harewood and Films of Record would like to make it clear that the production company and team were at all times concerned and engaged with the mental health of all of the team

and contributors, including David's. As with any challenging production, the mental health of everyone involved was paramount to the production company protocol.

# RTS **NEWS**

# RTS events IN BRIEF

# Dublin brushes up on social media

Newstalk's Jess Kelly brought the Republic of Ireland centre up to date with the latest thinking on social media at RTÉ, Dublin, in July. The Irish radio station's technology correspondent said that social media, while you 'might not agree with what it has to say, never sleeps and is always engaging'.

# Newcastle studio offers TV tips

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Re:Production, which won the Outstanding Contribution prize at the RTS North East and the Border Awards this year, opened the doors to its Newcastle studio in July. Managing partner Steve Hunneysett and his team offered advice about a career in TV production at an event run by Re:Production and the RTS centre.

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# Awards enjoy Belfast launch

RTS Northern Ireland launched its 2019 Programme Awards at the New Orpheus in Belfast in July. The awards, sponsored by production facility Ka-Boom, will be announced at a ceremony held at the MAC during the Belfast Media Festival in November.

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# Centres extend their networks

There was a big turn out for the West Midlands Screen Industries Networking Summer Party, hosted by RTS Midlands, Film Birmingham and Women in Film & Television Birmingham, in the city in July. RTS East also hosted an evening in Norwich, to give the regional TV industry the opportunity to meet new Centre Chair Tony Campbell.

rth East e Border Theo Pegkas won the News award at the RTS North East and the

Border (NETB) Awards for the second year running in February. The University of Sunderland broadcast journalism student took the prize for a report on Greek unemployment. A year earlier, he won the same award for a piece on a demonstration in Newcastle against US President Donald Trump.

At the NETB Awards this year, Pegkas met BBC News journalist and presenter Simon McCoy, who invited him to spend a day at the corporation's newsroom in London. "It was great to welcome Theo to the BBC newsroom in June - I have a feeling we will see him here again," said McCoy. "When I walked him through the newsroom and explained what the various departments did he was intrigued. When I took him around the TV galleries and the technical areas, he was telling me what they all did."

"Winning two RTS awards has opened up some great opportunities, from which I have gained lots of experience," said Pegkas. "At the BBC's HQ I got an insight into one of the world's leading news organisations. That came



# Student gains BBC insight

after a two-week placement at BBC Newcastle, where I got to work with some incredible people who shared their experience and knowledge."

Pegkas has recently graduated from the University of Sunderland and hopes to work in broadcast journalism and "put into practice everything I have learned and develop my skills".

Graeme Thompson, pro vice-chancellor at the University of Sunderland, said: "Theo is a remarkable young man with a great future ahead of him. He is a good example of what can happen when you enter the RTS Student Television Awards and get noticed by professionals who want to help." Matthew Bell

# Leeds holds diversity summit

forces with the Creative Diversity Network at the Queens
Hotel, Leeds, in July to find ways to increase the black and minority ethnic diversity of TV crews in the region.
Among the solutions suggested were better recruitment practices, removing barriers and on-the-job

RTS Yorkshire joined

This was the second in a series of regional discussions held by the Creative Diversity

mentoring.

Network and the RTS. The first was in Cardiff in June.

The Leeds session was facilitated by Fraser Ayres, who runs the TriForce Creative Network, which aims to promote equal opportunities in the entertainment industry. He was joined by Sarah Lee, creative director of The Talent Manager, Nicola Lees from the Sara Putt Agency and Minnie Ayres, TriForce director of operations.

Lees showed a clip from this year's Glastonbury festival

in which superfan Alex Mann joined the rapper Dave on stage, offering it as a master-class in support and mentoring. But one of the attendees argued that this interpretation depended on the prism through which you were watching – as a black person, it could be seen as an example of cultural appropriation.

"This is just the start of these important conversations – but what a start," said RTS Yorkshire Chair Fiona Thompson. North East &the Borde How do you stop talented creatives quitting the regions and moving to London?

That was the challenge discussed by Tim Weiss, director of vocational skills at ScreenSkills, during a session organised by the RTS in Sunderland.

"We need to match talent from around the UK with skills shortages," he told an audience at the National Glass Centre, part of the University of Sunderland, in early July. "And we want to help build sustainable infrastructure in different parts of the country linking universities, colleges and employers."

During a lively Q&A, audience members gave examples of creative talent quitting the North East because "work is increasingly concentrated in London, the North West and Scotland".

They also spoke of the "Catch 22" situation which meant that, without sustainable production companies based in the area, only a handful of individuals working in the region are eligible for the support of Screen-Skills programmes.

Event host Graeme Thompson, pro vice-chancellor at the University of Sunderland,





# Stopping the brain drain

pointed out that ITV and the BBC had brought long-running dramas to the region in the form of *Vera* and *The Dumping Ground*. And he speculated that the move of Channel 4 to Leeds would have an impact on production capacity in the neighbouring North East.

Weiss described other ways in which ScreenSkills might support the talent pipeline outside the capital. This included the introduction of forecasting analysis  creating a skills barometer to identify the kind of jobs and careers likely to be available in five or 10 years.

There is also a trainee finder service and a progression initiative for individuals wanting to acquire new skills to move forward in their careers

Weiss said diversity of talent was a significant issue – not just in creating opportunities around gender, race and disability but also in different geographic and socio-economic areas of the country. He encouraged North East production businesses to take part in November's Creative Careers Week, which ScreenSkills is organising alongside the Creative Industries Federation and the Creative and Cultural Skills agency. It is an opportunity for artists, producers, curators, actors, designers and crew to talk to young people about routes into television and the creative industries.

# Society awards technology prize

■ BBC broadcast engineering trainee Lawrence Card has won this year's prestigious RTS Young Technologist Award.

Card, who has spent the past two years on the BBC broadcast engineer trainee graduate scheme, previously worked as an operations engineer at ITV.

'The standard of entries was remarkably high this year but Lawrence's broad industry



perspective and wide technical knowledge, coupled with his self-motivated, tenacious and confident approach, makes him a very worthy winner,' said digital media consultant Terry Marsh, who chaired the RTS Young Technologist Award jury.

Catherine Summer, BBC
New Talent Tech Schemes
programme manager, added:
'Lawrence has displayed an
enthusiasm to harness new
technology and provide the
production teams with tools to
enhance the way they engage
audiences, and this determination and innovative thinking is
why he's thoroughly deserving of

the Young Technologist Award.'

The annual RTS Young Technologist Award is sponsored by netgem.tv and presented in memory of the distinguished television engineer AM Beresford-Cooke.

Card, who will receive the award at the RTS Craft & Design Awards in November, wins an all-expenses-paid trip to Amsterdam for this month's media technology show, IBC.

The runner-up and recipient of the Coffey Award for Excellence in Technology 2019 is Jake Brightman, a studios technical assistant at ITN.

Matthew Bell

# RTSNEWS

Your guide to upcoming events. Book online at www.rts.org.uk

# **National events**

### **SCREENING**

# Wednesday 11 September Damian Lewis: Spy Wars screening and Q&A

Global premiere of the History doc with key production team members. 6:30pm for 7:00pm *Venue: TBC* 

## RTS CAMBRIDGE CONVENTION

# 18-20 September

# Content, consumers and everything in between

Principal sponsor: ITV. Chaired by Carolyn McCall, CEO, ITV. Speakers include: Julian Bellamy, MD, ITV Studios; Karen Blackett OBE, country manager, WPP; Paul Bojarski, CEO, Sceenic; Philippa Brown, CEO, PHD Worldwide; Jordan Casey, CEO, Casey Games; Rob Chapman, CEO and partner, Founders Intelligence; Vikki Cook, director, content media policy, Ofcom; Tim Davie, CEO, BBC Studios; Jeremy Darroch, CEO, Sky; Howard Davine, executive VP, business operations, ABC Studios; Julie Etchingham, ITV News; John Gapper, chief business columnist and associate editor, FT; Tony Hall, Director-General, BBC; John Hardie; Reed Hastings, CEO, Netflix; Sir Lenny Henry; Tim Hincks, Co-CEO, Expectation; Stephen Lambert, CEO, Studio Lambert; Nils Leonard, founder, Uncommon; Martin Lewis, financial journalist and TV presenter; Kevin Lygo, director of television, ITV; Dan McGolpin, controller, programming and daytime, BBC; Ben McOwen Wilson, regional director, YouTube EMEA and MD, YouTube UK; Alex Mahon, CEO, Channel 4; Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP, Secretary of State, DCMS; Piers Morgan, broadcaster; Tara Reddy, CEO and co-founder, Loveshark; Susanna Reid, broadcaster; Beth Rigby, political editor, Sky News; Kate Silverton, BBC; Deborah Turness, President, NBC News International; Jane Turton, CEO, All3Media; Kirsty Wark, writer

and broadcaster; Sharon White,

CEO, Ofcom; Linda Yaccarino, Chair of advertising sales and client partnerships, NBCUniversal; and David Zaslav, President and CEO, Discovery.

Venue: King's College, Cambridge CB2 1ST

# STEVE HEWLETT MEMORIAL LECTURE 2019

### Tuesday 24 September

# **Speaker Mark Thompson**

Mark Thompson is President and CEO of the New York Times Company, and a former Director-General of the BBC. Drinks reception sponsored by BBC Studios. 6:00pm for 6:30pm Venue: University of Westminster, London WIW 7BY

### RTS MASTERCLASSES

## Tuesday 5 November and Wednesday 6 November RTS Student Masterclasses

Venue: IET, 2 Savoy Place, London WC2R OBL

# **RTS AWARDS**

# Monday 25 November RTS Craft & Design Awards

Sponsor: Gravity Media Group London Hilton on Park Lane 22 Park Lane, London W1K 1BE

# **Local events**

# **DEVON AND CORNWALL**

- ■Jane Hudson
- RTSDevonandCornwall@rts. org.uk

### **EAST**

# Thursday 21 November

The Galaxy Britain Built: The British talent behind Star Wars – screening and Q&A With David Whiteley and special

guests. Venue: TBC

- Jayne Greene 07792 776585
- RTSEast@rts.org.uk

# **ISLE OF MAN**

- Michael Wilson
- michael.wilson@isleofmedia.org

### **LONDON**

# Wednesday 9 October

### **IBC 2019 review**

Joint event with the Institution of Engineering and Technology. 6:30pm for 7:00pm

Venue: IET, Savoy Place, London WC2R OBL

### Wednesday 4 December

# Christmas Lecture: David Abraham

6:30pm for 7:00pm

Venue: Cavendish Conference Centre, 22 Duchess Mews, London WIG 9DT

- Phil Barnes
- ■rts@philipbarnes.com

### **MIDLANDS**

# Thursday 3 October

Zomboat! masterclass and screening

Venue: TBC

### Monday 7 October RTS Midlands TV Careers

# Fair 2019

Tickets via Eventbrite.co.uk only. 10:00am-4:00pm

Venue: Edgbaston Stadium, Birmingham B5 7QU

# Friday 29 November RTS Midlands Awards

Venue: International Convention Centre, Broad Street, Birmingham B1 2EA

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

# **NORTH EAST AND THE BORDER**

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

### **NORTH WEST**

# Thursday 26 September Awards launch party

Details TBA

Venue: Compass Room, Lowry Theatre, Salford Quays M50 3AZ

## Saturday 23 November RTS North West Awards

Venue: Hilton Deansgate, 303 Deansgate, Manchester M3 4LQ

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

### **NORTHERN IRELAND**

### Thursday 12 September

The Big Media Quiz of the Year In partnership with Media Therapy. Host: documentary producer Paddy Duffy. 7:00pm Venue: Pug Uglys, 21 Bedford

Street, Belfast BT2 7EJ

## Thursday 7 November RTS NI Programme Awards

Venue: The MAC, 10 Exchange Street West, Belfast BT1 2NJ

- John Mitchell
- mitch.mvbroadcast@ btinternet.com

### **REPUBLIC OF IRELAND**

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

### **SCOTLAND**

# September – date TBC

# The technology behind weather reporting

With STV's Seán Batty. Venue: STV Pacific Quay, Glasgow G51 1PQ

- Cheryl Strong
- ■RTSScotland@rts.org.uk

### **SOUTHERN**

- Stephanie Farmer
- SFarmer@bournemouth.ac.uk

### **THAMES VALLEY**

- ■Tony Orme
- RTSThamesValley@rts.org.uk

### **WALES**

# Monday 28 October

# In conversation with Russell T Davies

Host: Gethin Jones. 7:00pm Venue: Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3ER

- Hywel Wiliam 07980 007841
- ■HWiliam@rts.org.uk

## **WEST OF ENGLAND**

- Suzy Lambert
- suzy.lambert@rts.org.uk

### **YORKSHIRE**

- Lisa Holdsworth 07790 145280
- lisa@allonewordproductions. co.uk



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