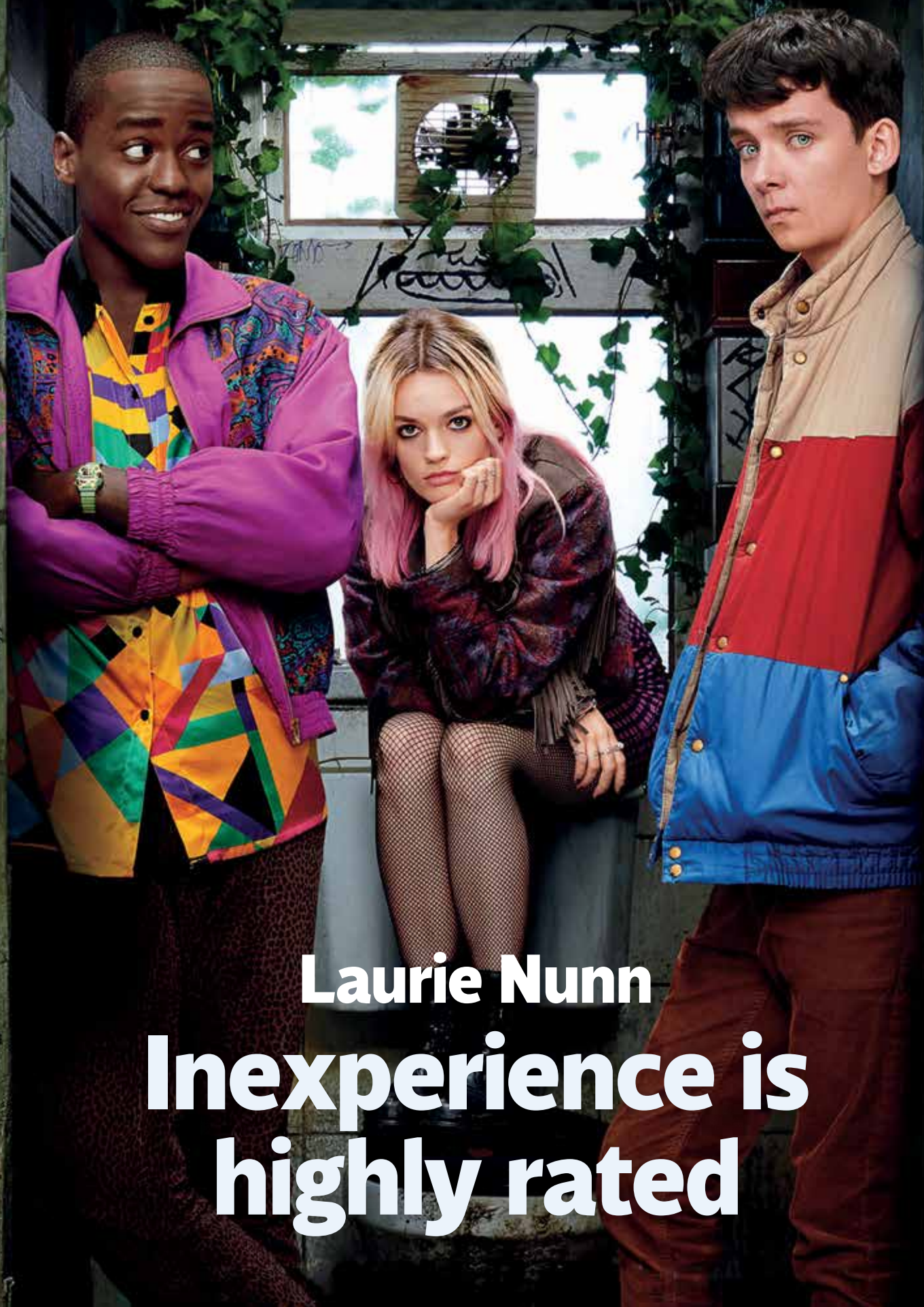


January 2020

Television



Laurie Nunn
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From the CEO



The year ended on a high for the RTS, with the conclusion of a packed events programme.

One of the last events was "Why we love... quiz shows". My thanks to all

the panellists who made it such great fun, not least the inimitable Anne Robinson.

Readers can test their own TV knowledge by tackling the RTS Futures Christmas Quiz in this issue. Enjoy.

The London Centre's prestigious Christmas Lecture featuring David Abraham was an opportunity for the former Channel 4 CEO to look back on

his career. He also highlighted new work coming out of his Wonderhood Studios.

For fans of fantasy, the RTS's exclusive screening of episode 6 of *His Dark Materials*, followed by a Q&A with the series' makers, was revelatory and confirmed the devotion audiences have for this amazing show. Congratulations to Jane Tranter, Jack Thorne and team for their curation of this precious franchise.

In Birmingham, soap sage Mal Young told the RTS how he successfully navigated the demands of US TV to keep daytime juggernaut *The Young and the Restless* in pole position in the ratings and the Emmys.

There are full reports from all these

events in this edition. I'm thrilled that our cover story is an interview with the creator of Netflix's hilarious *Sex Education*, Laurie Nunn. Caroline Frost's article is a must-read. In common with millions of other people, I can't wait for season 2.

A huge thank you to Peter Bazalgette for giving us his unique take on the year that was 2019.

Finally, a very happy, healthy and prosperous 2020 to all our readers.

Theresa

Theresa Wise

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TV diary

Simon Bucks' pre-Christmas preparations are reprioritised by the London Bridge attack and attending a funeral for a TV news luminary



When the editor of *Television* calls, my phone is bag-wrapped to prevent photography. I am at a secret charity dinner, supporting a military unit that I can't name, at a location I can't divulge. Social media is out.

The high-octane auctioneer Jonny Gould, who presented sport for me at *London Tonight*, alternately flatters the audience and abuses them ("Shut up in the cheap seats, with your clip-on ties and Casio watches").

The high-rollers spend astronomically. I stay statue-still rather than risk accidentally bidding 50 grand to be a commando for a day. Gould is nicely self-deprecating.

His son alleges that he appears "on TV shows no one watches at times no one is awake on channels no one has heard of".

Untrue, but funny.

■ It's Christmas party time, but at RTS HQ Jo Sampson and Jamie O'Neill are flat out, sorting the RTS Television Journalism Awards entries.

I am delighted that our new Digital Award has got good traction. It's for video journalism made primarily for internet-connected outlets, including YouTube and social media – an overdue innovation.

Days before the deadline, there's a big story – the London Bridge stab-bings – and an extension is requested.

I know from experience that

awards entries soak up resources. Without hesitation, I agree.

Jurors get the opportunity to review the absolute best of the year's video journalism. We will all be goggle-eyed over the holidays. By the time you read this, the judging will be well under way.

■ The British Forces Broadcasting Service (BFBS) straddles the two disparate worlds of media and military with trustees from both. The luvvies, David Moody (BBC), Darren Long (Sky), Mark Browning (Zinc) and Vanella Jackson (Omnicom), provide hugely valuable industry knowledge and advice.

At the Christmas lunch afterwards, the two groups mingle, each curious and, I suspect, a little envious of the other. Moody knows both – he was a "military brat" and BFBS was his constant companion as his family travelled the world.

The armed forces do carol services especially well. BFBS sponsors the brilliant choir at the ABF Soldiers' Charity service at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea. Again, my two worlds collide.

The pipers of the London Scottish Regiment come courtesy of Major General Alastair Bruce of Crionaich, better known in TV circles as Sky News's ceremonial and constitutional commentator, as well as the historical advisor on *Downton Abbey* and many other productions.

■ At a chilly St Martin-in-the-Fields, it's the Admiralty service of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity.

After the carols, we belt out *For Those in Peril on the Sea* before charging down to the crypt for restorative refreshments.

Ten days later, I am back at the same church for a sadder occasion: the funeral of Richard Lindley, the distinguished TV foreign correspondent – at ITN and later *Panorama*. The order of service includes a photo of a young, dashing Lindley in the uniform of the Royal Hampshire Regiment, another military/media crossover. The overwhelming theme is Richard's devotion to truth in journalism, which, Roger Bolton says, he stuck by regardless of the cost to him personally.

There are a few laughs. Michael Palin describes Richard as a good neighbour in north London: "We thought he was quite a catch when he moved in, especially as Lynsey de Paul had recently left."

The vicar's sermon text is "The truth will set you free" (John 8) but, he argues, real journalists who believe it, such as Richard, are increasingly rare. Journalism, he says, is becoming an "adjunct of marketing, governed by algorithms". Some of us disagree, sotto voce.

Richard's widow, Carole Stone, speaks immensely movingly of their mutual love. Her Christmas parties were legendary; media luminaries, tycoons and politicians vied for an invitation, so, unsurprisingly, the wake is packed to the gunnels.

Simon Bucks is CEO of BFBS and SSSVC, and Chair of the RTS Television Journalism Awards.

WORKING LIVES

Costume designer



The Trial of Christine Keeler

BBC

Pam Downe designed the fabulous 1960s outfits for BBC One drama *The Trial of Christine Keeler*, a new take on the Profumo affair, the sex scandal that rocked a British government and was a defining moment in that influential decade. She began her career as assistant to Oscar-winning costume designer Sandy Powell on Derek Jarman's *The Last of England*.

What does the job involve?

Preparation time is anything from six weeks for contemporary drama to 12 weeks for period pieces. Scripts, though, are often written to the wire.

When you have the scripts, you do lots of research, gathering together images and thinking about how you want the costumes to look. I then create mood boards and start the collaborative process with the

director, production designer, make-up designer and, often now, showrunner. Actors have input, too.

If you're making costumes, you start fabric sampling, producing sketches and getting the costumes made. Designers don't do the making; you have cutters and seamstresses for that. Finally, you start fitting the actors. You are constantly creating new costumes during the shoot – you can't get everything done up front.

Do you make everything?

No, you get stock from costume hire companies and there's a lot of rummaging around antique shops.

Modern or period?

People think contemporary is easier but everybody has an opinion on contemporary because they're living it. With period, strangely, you seem to get more freedom. I really like both.

How do you get into costume design?

Nowadays, it's best to come in as a trainee, learn on the job and work your way up – it can happen so quickly now, because there's so much work around. There are not enough people in the industry. With the arrival of the US streamers, so much more drama is being shot.

Are there specialist jobs?

If you want to be a cutter, you have to learn how to construct period costumes – many art-school costume courses are really good for that. Milliners also have to train.

For *The Trial of Christine Keeler*, what was your biggest challenge?

Christine lived in two different worlds. We all know about her mixing with [Conservative Secretary of State for War] John Profumo and the upper echelons of society, but she was also involved with Notting Hill's black community, which is where she felt most comfortable. I had to do costumes for scenes in West Indian shebeens – it was challenging to get right but it was also the most rewarding part of the job.

How has the job changed over time?

Preparation time is shorter and shoots are longer, especially on dramas for streamers.

What are the best and worst aspects?

When the costume, set and make-up come together and it looks good visually, [that gives me] so much pleasure. [The worst] are late casting and long hours.

What would you like to do in future?

Sci-fi would be fantastic, and so would 1920s and 1930s America – think of *Boardwalk Empire* – if you had the budget and time to do it richly. ■

Costume designer Pam Downe was interviewed by Matthew Bell.

Ear candy



With speculation that a 10th season of the US version of *The Office* is nigh, **Kate Holman** recommends a podcast based on the mockumentary



Fans of the US version of *The Office*, rejoice! Amid the constant pleas for a TV reunion, the next best thing has arrived in the form of a new podcast, *Office Ladies*.

The Office co-stars and real-life best friends Jenna Fischer and Angela Kinsey take a trip down memory lane and relive each episode from their unique perspective.

They dish the dirt on cast members and reveal what went on behind the scenes in each episode of the hit series.

When *The Office* premiered in the US in 2005, diehard fans of the British version struggled to get on board the American retelling. However, the show came into its own when the script diverted from the UK original in series 2.

It didn't take long for audiences on this side of the pond to fall in love with the zany characters and the hilarious everyday office dramas and mischief of the workers at the Dunder Mifflin paper company.

Fischer and Kinsey dissect each episode of *The Office* in the weekly podcast, revealing the set secrets, cast

in-jokes, Easter eggs and improvised scenes that made it into the final cut.

Edging closer towards that long-awaited reunion, the podcast also welcomes the occasional guest co-star, with Rainn Wilson, who played Dwight, and Brian Baumgartner, who played Kevin, sharing their experiences of working on the show.

Whether you're a fan wanting nostalgic second viewings or a devotee of the original UK series finally ready to take the plunge into the much-loved American remake, *Office Ladies* comes at the perfect time to brighten up these long winter evenings. ■



Netflix

Horny but heartfelt

Screenwriting

Laurie Nunn, the creator of *Sex Education*, invites us into her writers room, where awkward teenage memories are mined for dramatic gold. Caroline Frost reveals all

“I had got to a point before this happened where I was thinking about retraining. I’d just turned 30 and I thought, I’ve been doing this for so long and I can’t see it happening.” This frank admission by Laurie Nunn might bring some comfort to the thousands of other aspiring writers, hoping to emulate her apparently instant success and become Netflix’s next creative wunderkind.

On the face of it, hers is a fairytale story of an overnight phenomenon – with just four previous entries on IMDB and all of them including the word “short” in brackets, Nunn is the creator and writer of *Sex Education*, the zeitgeist-surfing teen sex comedy watched by 40 million viewers within the first four weeks of its release in January last year. The show was almost instantly recommissioned for a second series, which streams this month.

But she’s quick to add that the sailing, even on this project, wasn’t entirely smooth: “We couldn’t really find a home for it, people didn’t know what to do with it. I thought it had died a death, and then it ended up in the hands of Netflix and it came back to life, which was wonderful for me.

“Before that, I’d had lots of stuff in development, and things would get very close to a green light, but then somebody would leave their job, or the money would fall through...,” she shrugs. “That’s just the way it is in the industry, but I do believe that if you keep at it, you’ll have the right story for the right moment.”

With *Sex Education*, she definitely offers a show for the moment. It pays nostalgic homage to the ever-popular screen staple of teens going into battle with their hormones, while bringing it bang up to date with its serious discussions of sexual politics and contemporary attitudes towards relationships.

“I realised very quickly that it was an amazing opportunity to have a frank but funny conversation with a younger audience,” she says. “The conversations happening at the moment in that area are interesting, and moving so quickly, it felt a timely thing to do.”

At the centre of the show are Otis, his gay best friend, Eric, and elusive love interest Maeve. Asa Butterfield’s Otis is as squirm-ridden as you’d expect for a 16-year-old schoolboy with a divorced sex therapist for a ▶



'I HAD THE SKILLS IN TERMS OF WRITING... BUT EVERYTHING ELSE I JUST HAD TO LEARN ON THE GO'

› mother – Gillian Anderson clearly relishing the shock value of her role – but soon turns the knowledge he has inherited from her to good use.

He provides a sex counselling service to everyone else in the school, inevitably with one exception – his earnest self. Nunn is happy to admit to some personal inspiration. “Otis is probably the closest to me. I grew up with a single mum. She’s not a sex therapist, but the real intensity of that single-parent relationship is very familiar to me. In many ways, the mum’s the bad boy.”

Maeve, a sweet but bruised loner played by Emma Mackey, is also inspired by Nunn’s own childhood. “My closest friend in Australia, my best friend in high school, had the bad end of the stick with her family. She was that kid in school who can’t get a break because of the situation they’re in, so I wanted a character who reflected that survivor spirit.”

In thinking up the sexual antics and

awakenings that arise, often literally, through the series, Nunn happily harvests the collective awkward-memory consciousness of her writers room.

“There are about seven of us in the room, and a lot of the material comes from that,” she reports. “We sit in that room for five weeks – my friend describes it as the world’s longest dinner party.”

“We try to create a very safe space for people to share, as the content is very sensitive. But you realise really quickly that those teenage stories, they’re all similar. You’re always coming back to, ‘What did I want to know when I was 16?’”

Despite all the horror-fuelled jokes, the message of *Sex Education* is a sincere one. “At the heart of the show, it’s just very much about trying to be more open, to communicate more,” says Nunn. “I’m trying to show (especially male) characters who can talk to each other in an open, honest way.”

And, of course, in this era, on-screen



Sex Education: series 1 finale

Netflix

diversity is key, including black, gay Eric (played by Ncuti Gatwa) who comes out in true diva fashion at the school dance with the belated support of his father.

Nunn reveals that two writers contributed to the storyline because of “Eric’s intersectionality – I’m a white female, I wouldn’t presume to know what he was going through”.

She goes on: “Eric was the only character written so specifically. With everyone else, we felt that anyone could play the characters, but the show is about universal experiences, and I felt everyone should be able to see themselves on screen. I wanted to take the genre and update certain parts of it.”

This contemporary attitude, as well as the predominantly British cast, sits in contrast with the timeless, US-centric look of the show. While the bright colours, varsity jackets, swimming teams and school dance could all have come straight from *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* or the Rydell High

School of *Grease* legend, Nunn was always aiming for “a larger-than-life world” to accommodate her story.

“I felt the script always had a heightened feeling to it, so, when Ben [director Ben Taylor, fresh from Sharon Horgan and Rob Delaney’s *Catastrophe*] came on board with that vision, it all made sense to me. We both had a similar love of the teen genre, so it really came out of that conversation.”

Some of the rare criticisms of the show have focused on this aspect. “The conversations about the Americanness of it, that negativity, surprised me. But, as a team, we felt strongly about that decision and I still feel good about it,” Nunn says, before rolling off her own teenage favourites, which clearly inspire her work – *Freaks and Geeks*, *Dawson’s Creek*, all the John Hughes films plus the one movie she holds most fondly, *10 Things I Hate About You*.

“It’s so funny and very feminist, not ham-fisted, and also, Heath Ledger is just dreamy,” she finishes, suddenly sounding just like the teenagers she so successfully channels.

It’s tempting to assume that it must have all been very straightforward for Nunn, daughter of acclaimed theatre director Sir Trevor and his second wife, Australian actress Sharon Lee-Hill, to climb up the family ladder to creative success.

But, while she describes a childhood surrounded by storytelling and theatres – “in a pretty non-glamorous way” – it also took her to the other side of the world, where she began carving out her own path.

Aged 14 when her parents divorced, Nunn moved to Australia and studied for her first degree in film in Melbourne, before returning to London in her early twenties and embarking on more studies.

“When I finished my first degree, I realised I was quite young and it was hard to get stuff made,” she remembers of her first wake-up call. “I wasn’t quite prepared for it, and then that was around the time I was getting into TV box sets and I realised this form of storytelling was really speaking to me.

“I applied to the National Film and Television School for a screenwriting course and that was a great experience, very industry-focused.”

One of those who spotted Nunn’s college work was producer Sian Robins-Grace, then at production company Eleven and working on the seed pitch for what would become *Sex Education*.

From that one fortuitous meeting, Nunn now finds herself in the extraordinary position of not just sitting in a

writers room for the first time, but actually leading it, and on a massive global TV hit.

“I’d never been able to get into anyone else’s writers room, so when I was asked to create my own, I genuinely had no idea what I was doing. I basically had an extended panic attack that lasted for about five weeks. I had to fake it to make it,” is how

she remembers those first heady days. “There have been pros and cons. At first, I was just making it up, but I’ve been able to create my own way of doing it. I don’t know how other people do it, but it works for me. I had the skills in terms of writing the scripts, but everything else, I just had to learn on the go.”

Nunn’s future looks bright, with offers dropping in on the back of her unheralded success, and she has one eye freshly on the prospect of returning to her teenage passion of directing. For the moment, though, she remains consumed with *Sex Education*.

With the second series about to air, she’s waiting to hear whether there’ll be a third, but has already started writing. “Nothing much has changed. I’m still living in the brain of a 16-year-old.”

At home in north London, she describes creating the first draft of her scripts as the most painful part – “Once I’ve got something to craft and make better, I start enjoying it” – and is easily distracted by true crime documentaries and box sets. “*Six Feet Under* is my favourite show of all time, I always go back to it.”

From her current position, she can afford to be philosophical about her years of effort before *Sex Education* arrived. “When I first wrote it, it wasn’t the right moment but, five years down the path, it was.

“Most things in this industry take quite a lot time. You have to have persistence. The hardest things are keeping up your self-belief and putting your ideas out there, but I’m glad I stuck it out.” ■

‘I HAD AN EXTENDED PANIC ATTACK... I HAD TO FAKE IT TO MAKE IT’



Brexit, BritBox and beyond

JANUARY

The year begins and ends with Brexit, or “breakfast” as one confused supporter dubs it on TV. James Graham, the gifted chronicler of our times, creates *The Uncivil War* for Channel 4 and HBO. Graham perfectly captures how this febrile issue divides our nation by wealth, age and geography.

I’ve always thought it interesting that folk on the right tend to regard those on the left as misguided, whereas left-wingers regard rightwingers as immoral. The dichotomy is just as stark over Brexit. Brexiteers tend to see Remainers as a bit stick-in-the-mud, but Remainers think Brexiteers are reckless to the point of insanity.

Graham writes Shakespearean drama, in the sense that he reflects all shades of humanity without being simplistically judgemental in this way. A great quality.

ITV unveils its vegetable promotion

Review of the year

Peter Bazalgette looks back on a year of cliff-hanging drama

campaign: “Eat them to defeat them.” Just what a PSB should be doing. But the claimed 17 million portions sold sounds like an awful lot of sprouts.

FEBRUARY

It’s finally confirmed that BritBox will launch in 2019, with the BBC and ITV as the founder partners. The commentariat goes into overdrive about “this competitor to Netflix and Amazon Prime”.

This surprises me because, the last time I looked, we weren’t thinking of creating a debt-funded behemoth with hundreds of millions of subscriptions worldwide. The market research I’ve

seen shows an opportunity for one SVoD service in each country powered by indigenous media brands, as a niche competitor to the worldwide operators. Households will have, on average, two to four of these services, each costing less than a tenner a month. There’s clearly room for “the best of British content” in that mix.

I note that Sky now offers Netflix, and thus sees a future for itself as an aggregator of subscription services. Likewise, BritBox in the US sells many subs via the Amazon platform. And ITV’s blockbuster drama for TNT in the US, *Snowpiercer*, is co-funded by Netflix. Could it be that we’re becoming the best of frenemies?

MARCH

Unexpectedly, I get more unadulterated pleasure from *Harry’s Heroes: The Full English* than any other show this year. Yes, England’s old timers beat a team of German football veterans in the finale.



concession to the much smaller cohort who receive pension credit. In round terms, this will cut the cost to the licence fee from £750m to £250m.

Whatever dissembling politicians say now, this was exactly the latitude the government gave Auntie at the time of the last Charter renewal – or shotgun marriage, as some see it.

There are, of course, other ways. Our next government could start paying for this scheme again. Alternatively, it could row back generally on the assistance the baby boomers tend to receive at the expense of still-working generations. But, either way, why not leave the licence fee for programmes?

It is revealed that Sharon White will leave Ofcom for John Lewis. Great for her but a big loss for our industry. I lead a board simulation exercise for talented executives which Sharon takes part in. She grills me intensely on aspects of chairing. The day after, I find out why. Never knowingly undersold...

JULY

A bonanza month for sport. The BBC gets 11 million viewers for the Women's World Cup semi-final between England and the US. But, like ITV's Rugby World Cup final later in the year, the wrong result.

Then comes an epic Sunday on our screens: the Wimbledon Men's Final, the British Grand Prix and England vs New Zealand in the Cricket World Cup (with, apparently, the Women's Netball World Cup also on).

Mass audiences all round. But the cricket provides the most bizarre climax after a tie and a surreal extra over. It rivals an alleged entry in a score book in southern India: a lusty batsman drove the ball out of the ground and into the adjacent bay, where an opportunistic shark swallowed it – "bowled Patel, caught shark". Call me Baron Munchausen, if you like...

AUGUST

Ofcom publishes its second "Media Nations" report, reviewing key trends in TV and online video. More than half of TV households now have their set connected to the internet. Eight out of 10 adults have a smartphone. And around half of homes have at least one VoD subscription.

A great time to be a viewer and an unprecedentedly propitious time to be a storyteller, provided you get your model right. People still watched an average of 3.2 hours of broadcast TV ➤

Yes, gaffer Harry Redknapp is almost overcome when Robbie Fowler scores twice. Yes, we see a lot of middle-age spreads diminish as the physical fitness message goes home. But the game's final goal is redemptively scored by Paul Merson.

The most memorable part of the series was seeing him fishing on a river bank and reflecting on the nature of addiction. This chimes perfectly with the focus this year on mental health.

APRIL

A very significant announcement from my colleagues at ITV this month: a licensing agreement with Amobee (the global ad tech company now owned by Singtel).

In simple terms, this allows ITV Sales to offer brands and media buyers the ability to programmatically buy targeted impacts via our rapidly growing online platform, ITV Hub.

We still have the advantage of the largest simultaneous mass audience in the UK, but this adds new, critical functionality – something that is second nature to Facebook and Google.

In its 65-year history, ITV has done well with broad demographics and geographies, but this is a new era and a departure in corporate culture. Now, we need to have a relationship with each individual viewer/customer.

And things are hotting up all round:

the new, worldwide rival to Netflix/Amazon, Disney+, is revealed. As a group, its profits will go down, but I note its share price goes up.

MAY

What a revelation *Chernobyl* is. Funded by Sky and HBO, from the Jane Featherstone production stable, it makes no compromises in casting to deliver some breathtaking storytelling.

An additional bonus for me is that it gives a major sales boost to the 2018 winner of the Baillie Gifford Prize for Non-Fiction: *Chernobyl, History of a Tragedy* by Serhii Plokhyy. I call it a bonus because I chair the prize's board.

As well as the superb series, check out the book – both are hair-raising accounts of a society built on lies.

In this month, ITV ends *The Jeremy Kyle Show* after the death of a guest and introduces refreshed processes to support the wellbeing of programme participants.

We knew how important this was when I first produced *Big Brother* in 2000. But the big differentiators since then have been the novel pressure of social media coupled with a greater understanding of mental-health issues.

JUNE

The BBC announces that it will restrict free television licences for the over-75s. From June 2020, it intends to link the



England vs Australia in the Rugby World Cup quarter finals

► a day, but this was 11 minutes down on the previous year and 49 minutes down on 2012. This decline is, of course, steeper with younger viewers.

As we swiftly change our models, there's still an important role for the PSBs to deliver universally available, scaled services with programmes that must demonstrate a public purpose.

It's gratifying for the BBC to have Ofcom's report recognise the finales to *Bodyguard* and *Line of Duty* as enduring examples of mass appeal. Gratifying, also, for World Productions, part of ITV Studios, which makes both series.

SEPTEMBER

To Cambridge for our industry's biennial health check and workout, courtesy of the RTS. Here are some Cantab-bytes: "We ordered our diversity pizza ages ago, it's time to deliver" (Lenny Henry). And speaking of access: "You're never going to make it in TV. Your accent is appalling" (Lorraine Kelly).

Turning to modern viewing habits: "I go on trains and buses at 3:00pm to see what schoolchildren are doing" (Paul Bojarski); and "[the BBC will be] the best people to tell the stories of the UK to the world... with a distinctive set of British values" (Tony Hall).

The streaming competition: "Sometimes, you do your best work when challenged" (Reed Hastings); and "Holy shit – we're in trouble. What do the other seven guys have? Go get it. I don't care what you have to pay" (David Zaslav).

Finally, the value of broadcasting: "In an era of fake news... public service news has never been more important to our democracy" (Carolyn McCall, conference chair); and "Our society is getting more polarised and more tribal, [TV] can bring us together" (Nicky Morgan MP).

OCTOBER

I'm invited to speak in the City with BT, which is launching its "Beyond limits" campaign to tackle digital exclusion. I ask John Whiston, ITV's soap consigliere, whether *Corrie* or *Emmerdale* have had any recent storylines about society's struggles with the internet era that I can share.

I'm not disappointed, as they always have their finger on the nation's pulse. Jenny, the current Rover's Return landlady, reconnected with the *Street* via Facebook; there's been a coercive relationship where bullying Geoff changed all Yasmeen's passwords; and, over the Pennines, Ryan has created an online platform to help sell Matty's restored furniture.

Truly, Britain's soap operas are the essence of our national conversation.

NOVEMBER

Mid-month, Creative Careers Week has 500 employers across our sector opening their doors to thousands of young people to learn about the many rewarding career paths on offer. It's one of many initiatives we recommended to government in order to grow the creative industries

beyond their present £101bn value (more than 5% of the economy).

Having had our proposals endorsed by the current industrial strategy, there are now investments in nine "creative clusters" around Britain and further backing for immersive tech (virtual reality to you and me).

There's also a new sort of export board being set up as a joint venture with the Department for International Trade. We've finally got the creative industries on the national map. And, if you've seen the extraordinary growth figures for TV and film production, you'll know this is not before time.

DECEMBER

And so, as indicated, the year ends with the Brexit general election. Television is playing a more central part in the campaign than ever. Some great reporting on all the news programmes, taking the temperature of our nation as never before. And a plethora of debate and interview shows, to which all the leaders submit themselves at some point.

But lest we get carried away in a lather of self-congratulation, what's this? A block of ice in place of a politician... really? A three-minute piece to camera about trust... really? I recall being taught as a BBC news trainee (42 years ago, I confess) to report the story, not be the story.

And with that, a happy 2020 to all our readers. ■

Sir Peter Bazalgette is Chair of ITV.

OUR FRIEND IN THE WEST

There was a moment when I realised that everything had changed. I'd sent a team to the Arctic to attempt to paddle the world's largest fjord system two months earlier than would have been possible at the start of my career – because all the ice had melted.

Over 30 years, I've had a front-row seat as our rapidly changing climate pushes the natural world to the brink of collapse.

In the late 1980s, I researched the massive corals called Porites on the Great Barrier Reef for my PhD in marine biology, after which I spent more than 25 years at the BBC Natural History Unit. For the last four of these I ran the unit.

Now, I have my own Bristol-based production company, True to Nature.

The climate emergency poses challenges for everybody in the television industry. How do we balance entertainment with raising awareness? How do we engage viewers with such a tough topic? How do we make sure we don't make the problem worse?

At True to Nature, we aim to create premium content that puts conservation, the climate and the ever-increasing list of endangered species at the heart of the narrative.

In our recent series *Expedition with Steve Backshall*, Steve and the team embarked on 10 expeditions to different parts of the globe. The aim was to venture into uncharted territory in pursuit of new discoveries and world firsts.

The series, designed to appeal to a mainstream audience, has been sold in almost 150 territories and will achieve a global reach of 500 million.

Steve takes on epic physical challenges. They range from free diving in

All producers need to reduce their carbon footprints now, says natural history film-maker Wendy Darke



True To Nature

underground river systems and descending deep into the caves of the Mayan underworld to kayaking Himalayan white water. He scales previously unclimbed Arctic peaks.

Our aim is to engage the viewer emotionally with nail-biting action while simultaneously building an appreciation that our natural world is at risk.

In that Arctic expedition, Steve and the team kayaked through the Scoresbysund fjord in Greenland in June. What should have been a white blanket of solid sea ice was a huge expanse of dark blue water.

With the Arctic warming at twice the rate of the rest of the planet, the sea ice had melted earlier in that year than ever before in human history.

We highlighted the impact of climate change on the local ecosystem via an

encounter with a hungry polar bear. With their sea-ice hunting grounds melting, polar bears are forced to take every opportunity to find food and, in this case, it was the team that the creature was stalking. Our editorial approach to all our films is to capture real people and animals in real places. The aim is to discover more about our planet and ourselves.

As a company, it is important for us to reduce our environmental impact. *Expedition* was UKTV's first commission to be certified as a carbon-neutral production by Natural Capital Partners, which provides guidelines on environmental initiatives.

The series offset its carbon emissions by contributing to funding a REDD+ (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) project in the Rimba Raya Biodiversity Reserve in Kalimantan, Indonesia. This certification really matters for the team at True to Nature. We're committed to it for all future productions.

I hope this is something that will grow throughout our industry.

Viewers want to be entertained, not hectored. But I also believe that we have a responsibility, whether in public-sector or commercial broadcasting, to air uncomfortable truths – and that we can do so in ways that keep our audiences engaged.

If there is one thing I have learned during my career, it is that stories about wildlife have a unique power to touch people's hearts and to provide a clear window into issues that can otherwise feel too abstract.

Our aspiration at True To Nature is to use great storytelling to build life-long relations between people and the natural world. ■

Wendy Darke is founder and CEO of True To Nature.

Impartiality under siege

Election coverage

Roger Mosey argues that broadcasters were tested as never before in a rancorous campaign

Whatever your view of the result, it was a wretched and dispiriting election campaign.

Politicians seldom broke away from churning out the same sound bites, and on social media there was a level of viciousness that was unbearable.

It's therefore not exactly a surprise that the mainstream media, pressured by parties and harried by online trolls, had a rough ride in the 2019 general election, too. It is difficult, as the proverb goes, to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

Could broadcast media have done better, or are we doomed to a grim cycle of aggressive politics and battered journalism?

Without any doubt, the best bit of this campaign for television was when it ended. From the striking graphics of Sky's realisation of the exit poll onwards, all three of the main channels had an excellent results night.

Huw Edwards took to the BBC anchor's chair with charm and authority, and the strength in depth of the BBC's talent line-up was evident. A special round of applause to the designers and directors who, working for the first time within the confines of Broadcasting House, made the operation feel big and spacious, even if it wasn't Elstree or TCL.

Often, though, the most watchable moments were on ITV. Its panels were the sparkiest. Ed Balls and George Osborne, first paired in 2017, remain a wonderful combination. The interaction of Labour centrist Alan Johnson with Momentum's Jon Lansman produced some of the most telling

exchanges in the early coverage. Widi-ane Moussa, who led the guest booking team, should take a bow.

On Sky, John Bercow looked like a good hire before the event, but his value crumbled as the scale of his opponents' triumph became clear.

Coverage of the election campaign itself was less sure-footed. It has to be said that, these days, political journalism is much more difficult than it used to be. That's because the parties are trying to control much more – the open daily news conferences disappeared long ago – and also because the scrutiny from social media is so intense.

An error – or worse still, an imagined error – is immediately pounced upon and cited as an example of bias or conspiracy. The BBC was absurdly criticised for two cock-ups: one, when the wrong footage of Boris Johnson at the Cenotaph was used on *Breakfast*; and the other when laughter directed at Johnson during a peak-time live programme was edited out of a subsequent news clip.

Within the vast amount of BBC output, and with journalists working under intense pressure, it's understandable that mistakes happen. It's daft to ascribe them to partisanship.

But there were much more serious challenges to impartiality. The Prime Minister sent his apologies for Channel 4's debate on climate change and was irreverently replaced by a melting block of ice instead. The Conservatives' bullying response to this, and their threats to the BBC licence fee, were disturbing.

It was, however, the saga of Johnson's invitation to be interviewed by Andrew Neil that dominated the



middle part of the campaign. The media loves to talk about the media. Neil's interrogations of the party leaders on BBC One were one of the television highlights – first unsettling Nicola Sturgeon and then eviscerating Jeremy Corbyn.

But Johnson's refusal to commit to the same treatment gave the BBC a headache. It reacted by first talking tough and saying it would not let him take part in the Andrew Marr programme if he didn't also appear with Andrew Neil. Then, citing the London Bridge terrorist incident, it gave in and let the Marr interview go ahead anyway.

With Marr obviously under orders to be super-tough, and Johnson determined to bash ahead with a political agenda, it was the most unwatchable prime ministerial interview in television history.

A few days later, when it was clear that Johnson was a no-show for the peak-time programme, Neil delivered



'MORE EDITORIAL DECISIONS MADE IN THE NORTH OF ENGLAND... WOULD HAVE HELPED'

a withering put down of the PM – which was not to the taste of many former senior broadcast executives, who saw it as too much of a political intervention during a campaign.

There was a happier experience with the party leader debates – unless you were Jo Swinson, of course. It was good for viewers that the two men contending to be prime minister agreed to take part in head-to-head encounters. ITV achieved a coup in having Johnson and Corbyn standing alongside their

presenter Julie Etchingham as a piece of political history was made.

Etchingham was, as ever, terrific, and Nick Robinson also did a fine job in refereeing the BBC equivalent. The virtues of the two-way debate were reinforced by the unsatisfactory seven-way alternatives.

It is right that all the parties should be featured, of course, but the more politicians who are involved, the messier and more difficult to control it becomes.

Similarly, studio audiences can be a nightmare to balance. I was struck by the relatively subdued role of the public in the prime-ministerial debates. This was in sharp contrast with the vociferous BBC *Question Time* broadcast with four party leaders from Sheffield.

The latter seemed to have an oversupply of Corbynites, some of whom got to put soft questions to their leader, whereas Jo Swinson was battered by opponents with no contingent of Liberal Democrats to cheer her on.

But the biggest questions for the broadcasters are whether they missed the actual story of the election. There was an enormous effort to get out and about around the country.

It didn't, however, prove to be particularly illuminating. Too often, a constituency piece majored on voters doing everyday tasks, such as buying Christmas trees or visiting livestock markets, while grumbling about politicians in general.

One person would be quoted giving one view, while another would then immediately reply with the opposite. It was impartial, in the sense that both sides of an argument were represented, but it lacked insight into which view would prevail.

The most common line from correspondents was that both party leaders were equally unpopular and many voters had not decided which way to vote. With hindsight, we know that was untrue. Corbyn was markedly more disliked by traditional Labour voters than Johnson was by potential Conservative supporters; and the Remain versus Leave fault line was the determining factor of this election.

More editorial decisions made in the north of England and fewer in metropolitan London would have helped. Some reporters did identify and dwell on the collapse of the Labour vote – Lewis Goodall on Sky was one – but it was never as clearly defined in this campaign as it was in 1983, when Michael Foot actually won more seats.

Accompanying this was a tendency to spend too much time on the parties' agendas, rather than the public interest. I have some nostalgia for the days of the former BBC Director-General John Birt's journalism empire and, subsequently, the election grids produced by Mark Byford as deputy DG. They ensured that proper attention was given to all the big issues: defence, housing, social care and all the rest. It is difficult, though possible, to divert the politicians from their preferred topics.

This campaign showed that the terrain for television journalists is tougher than ever. Public service broadcasting is under threat as never before. Its imperfections were sometimes glaringly apparent, but no one should be in any doubt that we'd be worse off without it. ■

Roger Mosey is master of Selwyn College, Cambridge, and a former head of BBC Television News.

Hell's own media tribe

Content

Simon Shaps says that those attempting to identify the real Roys in *Succession* are missing the point

The guessing game about HBO's *Succession* takes off towards the end of the first episode, as the *capo dei capi*, media tycoon Logan Roy (played by Brian Cox), suffers a suspected brain haemorrhage. It seems the succession will be a simple coronation.

His son, Kendall Roy, has been handpicked to take control of Waystar Royco, the giant "entertainment, news and resorts" conglomerate that Logan founded. The first episode establishes Kendall's impeccable credentials, as he is seen acquiring a Myspace-style venture for Waystar run by a CEO who is not exactly biting his hand off to accept his offer of \$125 a share.

"I am not letting you Neanderthals rape my company," the CEO tells Kendall. "Fuck you, Daddy's boy." The due diligence on this acquisition presumably went swimmingly.

Gradually, however, it becomes clear that Logan Roy is going nowhere, certainly not to his grave, or even a prolonged period in intensive care.

He is defiantly not Viacom boss Sumner Redstone, hanging on to life but no longer in control of his empire. Shiv, the only daughter among the Roy offspring jockeying for position at the top of Waystar, is also definitely not Shari Redstone, Sumner's daughter.

So, if the Roys are not the Redstones, perhaps they are the Comcast dynasty, the Roberts? Or could they be, as some who know the family well suggest, the Scotts – as in Ridley Scott and the late Tony Scott and their offspring?

Or are they the Sulzberger clan of *The New York Times*? But surely the whole thing is a dark satire on the Murdochs?

The guessing game is certainly a fun spectator sport, but it misses the point. The genius of *Succession* is that it is brilliantly and defiantly not based on a true story, with all of the constraints that would require.

In this sense, it is the half brother – not quite family, but sometimes

close – of the shows based on the demise of Fox News founder and predatory monster Roger Ailes. These depict Murdochs who are unmistakably Murdochs, even if they are played by actors as eccentrically cast as Simon McBurney and Malcolm McDowell: McBurney plays Rupert Murdoch in the Showtime limited series *The Loudest Voice*, and McDowell plays the part in the movie *Bombshell*.

One of the many benefits of not attempting to depict the real Murdochs or Redstones is that it allows the writers free rein – and some of the most vicious, delicious dialogue on television.

In the same way that nobody in the White House, not even a fully charged, revved-up Barack Obama, could ever match the wit and rapid-fire repartee of Aaron Sorkin's politicians in *The West Wing*, no media tycoon of the past 50 years has talked like any of the Roys.

None of the media dynasties has produced a creature so comically reptilian as Matthew Macfadyen's Tom Wambsgans, Logan Roy's son-in-law, who is given the drama's ultimate hospital pass.

Obsequious, insecure, cuckolded, nakedly ambitious, "the cunt of Monte Cristo", as the brattish Roman Roy calls him, Wambsgans is the man who handles the cover-up of dark deeds in Waystar's cruise business.

The scandal threatens to derail the entire company and ends up with Logan Roy forced into a public mea culpa, reminiscent of Rupert Murdoch's apology for phone hacking by his tabloid newspapers.

Wambsgans is, at least, allowed one of the second series' best lines: "You don't hear very much about syphilis these days. Very much the Myspace of STDs."

There are no equivalents to the gangly, permanently bemused Greg Hirsch, "the world's tallest dwarf", who, as Logan's great-nephew, ends up playing a key role in the scandal Wambsgans tries to suppress. Or Roman, the foulest of all the foul-mouthed Roys, and the



Succession

Sky

one who inexplicably is often closest to the truth.

This is black comedy, laced with the best of US mob drama. Imagine Netflix's *The Irishman* with more laughs, more psychological depth and fewer bodies in the wood shredder.

So where does *Succession* come from and how did it get to be so good? Television drama about TV and media has a patchy history. The best shows have been straight comedies: *Episodes*, *30 Rock*, *Drop the Dead Donkey*, *WIA*, Aaron Sorkin's *Sports Night*. *The Hour*, Abi Morgan's *Mad Men* for 1950s British television news, ran for two series without catching fire. This was despite a cast that included Romola Garai, Ben Whishaw, Dominic West, Julian Rhind-Tutt, Juliet Stevenson, Andrew Scott, Peter Capaldi and Tim Pigott-Smith.

More recently, Apple TV's tent-pole series *The Morning Show*, feels like work in progress: the ultimate "package", with a cast that includes Steve Carell, Jennifer Aniston and Reese Witherspoon. Its #MeToo storyline is bang on zeitgeist, but the show is bogged down by soapy plotting.

Compared with those two series, *Succession* is grown-up, mature, peak-era TV. People working in scripted television in the UK sometimes like to

'THIS IS BLACK COMEDY, LACED WITH THE BEST OF AMERICAN MOB DRAMA'

say that the Americans do it best. But the key creatives behind *Succession* are largely British: Jesse Armstrong, Tony Roche, Lucy Prebble, Georgia Pritchett. Roche and Pritchett wrote for *The Thick of It*, and Armstrong, of course, co-created *Peep Show*, while Prebble's most relevant writing credit is perhaps not *Secret Diary of a Call Girl* but the stage plays *Enron*, with its astonishing take on corporate malfeasance, and *A Very Expensive Poison*, on the killing of Alexander Litvinenko.

Different as these writers are, they all have in common a fearlessness about tackling big subjects and a fascination with the exercise of power, as well as an ear for profanity, the weaponised language of the entitled and powerful.

Oddly, the weakest episodes in the first two series of *Succession* are set in the UK. It is as outsiders, Brits writing about Americans in their own backyard, that they are able to take a wrecking ball to Waystar and the Roy family.

They have created a drama that explores how family dynamics play out at the highest levels of corporate life, with a cast of characters hewn from the same rock as Malcolm Tucker. True stories have much to recommend them, but *Succession* gratifyingly offers so much more. ■

Content

The team behind *RuPaul's Drag Race UK* explains how the show successfully crossed the Atlantic

RuPaul's *Drag Race* enjoyed a triumphant transatlantic transplant to BBC Three in the autumn. "Drag queens and TV are like peanut butter and jelly – the perfect combination," argued the show's creator, Fenton Bailey, to a full house at a lively RTS Futures event in November.

US production company World of Wonder, which Bailey founded with fellow film-maker Randy Barbato almost 30 years ago, makes *RuPaul's Drag Race* in both countries. The duo first came across the drag artist performing in Atlanta, Georgia, in the 1980s. "What we saw in that moment was that RuPaul was a star," recalled Bailey.

RuPaul's Drag Race has been on US television for a decade, winning numerous Emmy awards for the show and its host. It premiered on US gay pay-TV channel Logo in 2009, before moving to entertainment channel VH1 in 2017 and finding a mass audience.

Over the course of the series, artists compete to become the nation's drag superstar. "Every gay bar in the [US] plays *Drag Race* at the same time and that's part of how the show became so popular – you go, meet friends and watch the show. Its sports for gay people," said UK and US showrunner Bruce McCoy.

"It's been extraordinary to watch the journey of the show from targeted LGBT channels – such as Logo, and OutTV in Canada and the Netherlands – which initially picked up the show, and see the show grow," said Sally Miles, who handled international distribution for the US version of *RuPaul's Drag Race* and is now an executive producer on the UK series.

Bailey recalled the show's early days in the US: "The first season was out of focus and very low-budget. Logo was a tiny network and I don't think anyone thought to cancel us."

But Miles had more faith in the show:

The Vivienne, winner of the first season of *RuPaul's Drag Race UK*



Race to the top

'DRAG QUEENS AND TV ARE LIKE PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY – THE PERFECT COMBINATION'

"It always had potential – it was so accessible and relatable to a young 16- to 34-year-old audience. When we took it to Netflix, it demonstrated that this was an [entertainment] show for a broad audience."

BBC entertainment commissioning editor Ruby Kuraishie agreed: "On first glance, it's a subculture niche show; on second glance, everyone can relate to it; on third glance, it's funny – why wouldn't you do it?"

McCoy said: "People know the show and our job was to not fuck it up. It's really the same show as we do in the States – it's a comedy show masquerading as a reality show, with a lot of heart to it... but [we wanted to] add as much Britishness as possible."

"We went in with the mindset of, 'Let's make it British', but not to the point of blowing up the show. It's a lot easier to put together a show that's won Emmys, that people love and want to work on."

Bailey made the point that Britain "has a great drag tradition, from Shakespeare to the [Royal] Vauxhall Tavern, which is where Randy and I saw Lily Savage. Drag is a universal language but it's different in every culture... each version of the show should have its own character." A version of the show has run in Thailand for two series, with Canada and Australia set to follow this year.

The UK show – with RuPaul as host and head judge – began its run on BBC Three in October. Guest judges included Michaela Coel and Twiggy, as well as regulars Graham Norton, Alan Carr and Michelle Visage, who is also a judge on the US programme.

It chalked up more than 6.5 million iPlayer requests by the time the series passed its halfway mark. BBC Three has commissioned a second run. "I commissioned a brand-new programme [for the UK] but it's got 10 years' experience behind it.... I've tailored it for us," said Kuraishie. She

continued: "I knew when we were filming that it was going to be a great show. So, the rest of it, for us, was just to sell it and build that frenzy."

"We had a lot of interest in *Drag Race* as soon as we announced it and my inbox was deluged by D-list celebrities wanting to be judges."

BBC Three promoted *RuPaul's Drag Race UK* at Manchester Pride, where contestants from the show made an eye-catching appearance last summer. "It felt like a brilliant way to release the queens, because... the programme is regional and diverse in every way," said Kuraishie.

The lack of commercial breaks on the BBC has given the programme-makers more freedom, allowing for more backstage chats between the contestants. "[A] scene can be as long as it needs to be, as opposed to eight minutes [maximum] because that's [the gap] between commercials," explained McCoy.

Navi Lamba, BBC Three head of social, suggested that it was the perfect fit for the online channel: "BBC Three's mission has always been to help young people navigate their way in the world. [*Drag Race*] is showing usually under-represented voices and showcasing them on a huge platform."

The series was released on iPlayer at 8:00pm every Thursday, peak time for viewing on the platform. "*Drag Race* is ultimately event television," said Lamba. Everyone who works on the social media content "truly understands the show. The fans have been watching the [US version of the] show so long that they would be able to sniff out a fraud." ■

Report by Matthew Bell. The RTS Futures event 'Start your engines: Bringing RuPaul's Drag Race to the UK' was held on 11 November at Tanner Warehouse in central London. It was chaired by TV critic and broadcaster Scott Bryan, and produced by Ed Gove and Jude Winstanley.

A lot more than entertainment

'Growing up was really hard,' said Owen Farrow, who appeared in the UK series as Divina de Campo. He was at school in the north of England when Section 28, which prohibited the 'promotion' of homosexuality in schools, was introduced by the Thatcher government in 1988, and which remained in force for 15 years.

'All the gremlins in my head are from kids in the playground pushing and shoving me, and calling me a fag and throwing their drinks at me.... It did a lot of damage to people like me.'

'For most teachers, [homosexuality] could not be spoken about – so it just erased gay people completely,' Farrow told his fellow competitors on the show.

The clip from *RuPaul's Drag Race UK*, during which an emotional Farrow was in tears, was shown at the RTS Futures event. '[I] had no understanding as a gay person that there could be a different way of living.'

'Now, having been in schools and worked as a teacher, kids' attitudes are completely different.'

'I had an incident where one girl called me a "faggot". She stomped out and everybody else was outraged that she said that to me. To say the kids are different now is to completely underestimate where we are.'

'It made me feel that all those kids who were like me had hope – they weren't going to have the same struggle.'



Why we love quiz shows

Entertainment

An RTS event answers the \$64,000 question – why are we so addicted to TV quizzes?

Anne Robinson in *The Weakest Link*

Quiz shows are enjoying their golden age. Never before has the armchair quizzer had so many opportunities to show off their knowledge in front of the TV. *The*

Wall and *Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?* prosper in primetime, but it's during the daytime and early-evening schedules that quiz shows come into their own.

ITV has *The Chase*; the BBC, *Pointless*, *Eggheads* and Richard Osman's *House of Games*; and Channel 4, the venerable *Countdown* and *The £100K Drop*. For more highbrow viewers, there's *Only Connect*, *University Challenge* and *Mastermind*.

"Audiences love them but, in terms of filling schedules, they're pretty cost-effective. Because you can [film] four a day, they make financial sense," said Jo Street. The Channel 4 head of daytime was talking at an RTS early-evening event in December that celebrated TV quiz shows.

Anne Robinson – known for her much-imitated catchphrase, "You are the weakest link... goodbye", which she used to dismiss contestants from her show – was the star turn on the panel. Over 12 years, from the turn of the century, she hosted almost 1,700 episodes of *The Weakest Link*, earning herself the title "the rudest woman on television" for mocking the show's participants.

Robinson revelled in her role, embracing *The Weakest Link*'s format, which encouraged contestants to be ruthless in their pursuit of the £10,000 top prize.

"I was incredibly rude to thousands of people," she said. "Normally, a host [says], 'Hello, how are you?' But, right from the beginning, I knew it was important not to make friends with anyone. We did very well with me being increasingly horrible."

Occasionally, Robinson recalled, she went too far: "Sometimes, I would have a go at, say, a student, and I would come off and say, 'That was killing kittens.' What you needed was someone cocky, who thought they were going to get the better of you. And then you could be seriously rude."

The show's success in its early-evening BBC Two slot led to promotion to the BBC One prime-time schedules – and a jump in the jackpot prize to £50,000.

"It was a brilliant format but the format wouldn't have been what it was without Annie," said Street, who worked with Robinson on *The Weakest*

BBC

From left: Jo Street, Judith Keppel, Boyd Hilton, Anne Robinson and James Fox



Who wants to be a millionaire?

‘Huge sums of money and quite easy questions’ were the motivation for Judith Keppel to enter *Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?* She was the first person to win £1m, two years after the show launched on ITV in 1998.

Hosted by Chris Tarrant, *Millionaire* was an instant success, attracting audiences of up to 19 million.

The audience at the RTS early-evening event was treated to a clip of Keppel’s triumph – one of British TV’s most iconic moments. Despite appearing calm and clear-headed as she pondered the jackpot question – Which king was married to Eleanor of Aquitaine? – Keppel admitted: ‘I was like a duck – I was paddling madly underneath. I wasn’t calm at all. I thought my heartbeat was so loud that the mics would pick it up.’

‘It was an incredibly exciting programme.... For the viewer, you can see in their faces whether they’re going to take a risk or... whether they’re thinking of the mortgage and going to take the money.’

Remarkable MD James Fox worked on the first series of *Millionaire* as a researcher: ‘No one knew it was going to be that big – but it was instantly huge. The format is genius, because there’s enough in there to let people take a gamble.’

ITV revived *Millionaire* in 2018 with Jeremy Clarkson asking the questions, and the odd tweak to the format. Keppel, though, prefers the original: ‘I thought Chris Tarrant was so good and it was so much his show. I don’t think Jeremy Clarkson is as good... but I’m biased.’

* Henry Ill

Link. “[It] wouldn’t have been a good show with a warm and cuddly host.”

So what’s the secret of a successful quiz show? “The whole family can join in and you can sit at home and be clever. And, if you’ve got a good quiz show, once you start watching, it’s very difficult not to watch to the end,” suggested Robinson.

Familiarity is also important, argued James Fox, MD of Remarkable, which has a roster of quiz shows, including BBC juggernauts *The Wall* and *Pointless*. “When *Pointless* isn’t on at 5:15pm, there’s uproar and the BBC gets more complaints about it than any other thing,” he claimed.

A good quiz, he continued, is something “you can come back to, day after day, [where] you know the format”.

Street has overseen many quizzes over the years. Once, when in charge of BBC quiz *Eggheads* – now in its 17th year – she made the mistake of breaking the series’ run as a high jackpot was building. “The complaints log crashed, because the result never played out,” she said. “You disrespect the quiz audience at your peril.”

The Channel 4 exec added: “[Quiz-zes] are a way to define a channel – you know what a channel is by which quizzes are on it. And it’s a way of putting people on telly – people love to see themselves reflected. And they bring you massive audiences.”

“People watch the highbrow ones, such as *University Challenge* and *Mastermind*, for the same reasons that [they] watch sport – [to see] people being really brilliant,” argued Judith Keppel. Her £1m win on *Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?* (see box) led to a TV career as an *Eggheads* expert. She has been in

every series since the show’s launch in 2003.

“You’ve got to have a great format but the host, in the end, will be the thing that really makes the show special,” proposed Fox.

“A host can bring an audience as well – look at Danny Dyer on *The Wall*,” interjected Street.

The *EastEnders* actor’s cockney-geezer shtick gives the BBC One Saturday prime-time quiz, which started life on NBC in the US, “a completely different flavour from anything else you’ve ever seen”, said Fox.

And the brainboxes who come up with the questions are as important as the host. “They make or break a quiz, because the tone of a question defines the show,” noted Street. “It’s one of those brilliant, dark arts.”

Is there room for a new quiz on TV? “It’s really hard to launch a new quiz, especially in daytime. The ones that we’ve got at the moment are really potent still,” said Street. But, she added, commissioners are looking for “something that’s got a format that at least tries to do something different, that you haven’t seen before, or – even worse – isn’t on telly now”.

Are there any shows the panellists would like to revive? Keppel voted for *Top of the Form*, a quiz for secondary-school children that ran on BBC One from 1962 to 1975.

Fox plumped for one of his indies’ own shows, *Deal or No Deal*, which, hosted by Noel Edmonds on Channel 4, ran to more than 3,000 episodes. “These shows can run and run,” he said.

Blankety Blank, said Robinson: “I’ve been on it twice and I haven’t the foggiest idea of how it works.” ■

Report by Matthew Bell. The RTS early-evening event ‘Why we love... quiz shows’ was held at the Cavendish Conference Centre in central London on 2 December. It was chaired by Boyd Hilton, entertainment director of *Heat* magazine, and produced by Sally Doganis and Vicky Fairclough.



Tom Allen and Ria Hebden

Paul Hampartsoumian

The quiz of the year

Television executives and young telly talent joined forces for the annual RTS Futures Christmas quiz – hosted by comedian Tom Allen who was assisted by TV presenter Ria Hebden – at Channel 4's HQ in December.

The team of Channel 5 execs and budding TV talent, the aptly named "Beyoncé Know-Alls", were victorious. They took home the RTS Futures Christmas quiz trophy plus priority tickets for a live show of their choice, including *Dancing on Ice*, *The Graham Norton Show* and *The Big Narstie Show*. Can you match their performance?

Telly true or false

- Before being hired to narrate ITV2 reality show *Love Island*, Iain Sterling auditioned to be on the first series in 2015.
- Since it first aired in 1962, highbrow BBC quiz *University Challenge* has only ever had three presenters.
- Cadbury Creme Egg launched its 2019 Easter egg campaign with the first adverts airing on Boxing Day 2018.
- Film director Baz Luhrmann took his name from TV fox Basil Brush.

- In 2019, Channel 5 aired a new medical series titled *People Like Us: Zit ER*.
- Iconic TV series *South Park* started life as an animated video Christmas card.
- The Queen's Christmas Message* was first televised on the BBC in 1957.
- The BBC announced that national treasure Mary Berry was due to make a guest appearance in the 2020 New Year's Day episode of *EastEnders*.

TV stories of 2019

- RuPaul's Drag Race* got its own UK version in October. But how many series of the US version have there been to date and when did the US version first air?
- Sharon Horgan and Rob Delaney's Channel 4 comedy *Catastrophe* came to an end last year with the couple attending the funeral of Rob's mother. Who played his mother in the series?

- The Crown* season 3 streamed on Netflix in November. But in what year do we join the royals?
- Game of Thrones* had its last hurrah in 2019. Fans were left disappointed, however, when plans for a prequel were cancelled by HBO. What was that series going to be called?
- In May, James Corden made an exciting announcement on Twitter. What was it?
- In the autumn, ITV premiered its costume drama *Sanditon*, based on an unfinished novel by which author?
- The 'Hot Priest', played by Andrew Scott, caused a sensation in the second series of hit BBC series *Fleabag*. But what animal is he afraid of?
- Which TV detective from BBC drama *The Missing* got his own spin-off show last year?

Christmas on the box

- On Christmas Day 2018, 25 years after his death in *Neighbours*, Jim Robinson returned to the soap as a vision in what festive object?
- Dubbed 'The Queen of Christmas', which US singer was the star of the 2019 Walkers Crisps Christmas adverts?
- In the UK, the single biggest Christmas Day TV audience was recorded in 1989, when almost 22 million people tuned in to BBC One to watch the TV premiere of which film? Was it: a) *Crocodile Dundee*; b) *Die Hard*; or c) ET?
- Singers from *The X Factor* have had the UK Christmas number one seven times. Who was the last *X Factor* singer to have the Christmas number one?
- Which of the following has **not** delivered Channel 4's *Alternative Christmas Message*: a) President of Iran Mahmoud Ahmadinejad; b) civil rights campaigner Reverend Jesse Jackson; or c) WikiLeaks whistleblower Julian Assange?
- Last November, Netflix released its first full-length original animated film about the origins of Santa. What is it called?
- Running for six series from 2010, which British drama aired its final episode on ITV on Christmas Day 2015?
- In the 2019 John Lewis Christmas advert, what is the name of the excitable little dragon?

ANSWERS

8	Edgar	8	Julien Baptiste	8	True	6	True
7	Downton Abbey	7	Foxes	7	True	5	True
6	Klaus	6	Jane Austen	6	True	4	True
5	Julian Assange	5	Special	5	False	3	False
4	Ben Haenow	4	Christmas	4	False	2	False
3	Crocodile	3	Gavin & Stacey	3	False	1	False
			Bloodmoon				
			Christmas on the box				
			1 A Christmas bauble				
			2 Mariah Carey				
			3 Crocodile Dundee				
			4 Christmas				
			5 Christmas				
			6 Christmas				
			7 Christmas				
			8 Christmas				

The mould breaker



Christmas Lecture

Former Channel 4 CEO **David Abraham** reflects on a working life encompassing advertising and running TV networks on both sides of the Atlantic

In one way, the career of David Abraham has come full circle. He began his working life in advertising – and, in his latest role, running his own company, Wonderhood Studios, he is once again involved in producing TV commercials, as well as making TV programmes. With his trademark heavy-rimmed glasses and carefully judged wardrobe, Abraham still looks like he might have stepped out of the pages of *ad bible Campaign* at its 1980s' peak.

At the RTS London Christmas Lecture, he was guided back through his career by *Broadcast* editor Chris Curtis, who began the retrospective with the media executive's role as joint-founder of the pioneering advertising company St Luke's in the mid-1990s.

Judged by a Channel 4 *Cutting Edge* documentary about the agency – a clip was shown to the RTS – St Luke's was very much ahead of its time. The company's HQ – not unlike those of today's tech giants, not least Google – was designed to somehow blur the edges between work and play.

There were bunk beds, a pool table and chairs straight out of a film celebrating the swinging sixties. Even "reading" *The Sun's* page-three feature was apparently regarded as being part of the daily grind. St Luke's offices bore more than a passing resemblance to a 1990s' nightclub and the company was founded on certain fashionable principles, according to Abraham.

"We basically chucked every bit of management theory at it," he said. "It brought out both the best in people and also the worst. It became really ungovernable once it got to about 200 people." This willingness to take risks and to try and do things differently would become a hallmark of his career as he headed into the less freewheeling world of TV.

When Abraham joined Discovery in 2001, as general manager of Discovery Networks Europe, the company was still very much under the influence of its far-sighted, public-spirited founder, John Hendricks.

"It was a really special moment," Abraham said. "John was a visionary, effectively taking the best of UK PSB content into the US. For me, it was a formative experience to join Discovery as 9/11 happened...."

"Everyone tried to respond to that event via the medium of documentary. TV was at the very centre of >

Wonderhood Studios

Abraham on...

... Fighting privatising of Channel 4

'In the run-up to the Brexit referendum,' recalled David Abraham, 'there was a letter from John Whittingdale [at the time, culture secretary] to Tony Hall, Adam Crozier and myself, effectively like a headmaster's letter, giving us a warning about the concept of due impartiality.'

'The notion... was [that] one was obligated to give equal airtime to all points of view. In parallel with that, every weekend in the *Sunday Times* were stories along the lines of "We're going to review the BBC licence fee", "We're going to privatise Channel 4".'

'I'm not a conspiracy theorist, I'm just describing what was going on at that time.'

He added: 'If you decide to privatise Channel 4, you cannot have the delivery of its entire remit. The unprofitable parts of the schedule, such as *Channel 4 News* and *Dispatches*, would disappear if Channel 4 was privately owned.'

'You have to re-educate people as to how the thing actually works.'

... On the future of the UK PSBs

'They are, first and foremost, cultural institutions and remain massively influential... The business models that support the PSBs are more challenged than they've ever been.'

'I think that both the BBC and Channel 4 have the ability to keep producing and being known globally for extraordinary content, storytelling and journalism.'

'Look at the impact of Channel 4's Cambridge Analytica investigation...'

'I see a weakening of political will around the licence fee, and it potentially being an issue, which has to be guarded against. I've never bought the trope that says the BBC licence fee can't survive.'

events. It was an extraordinary time to be in telly."

Discovery was at the cutting edge of the brave new world of multichannel TV, as audiences could now access up to 30 channels, not just five.

As a non-programme-maker and as an outsider coming to TV from advertising, his critics called out Abraham for being a pseud. How did he react to this?

"I was always a great friend of TV," he replied. "I'd had various interactions with the TV world at St Luke's. There's always been a brilliant cultural

exchange between the two worlds of advertising and TV... I've always been at the commercial end of creativity."

His next job was running the Discovery-owned cable channel TLC in the US. He succeeded BBC executive Jana Bennett, so had a hard act to follow. "That was a scary moment," admitted Abraham. "I was running a cable network with 90 million homes and I'd only been in telly for about three years."

TLC needed a new hit. Fortunately, its new head found one in *Miami Ink*, set in a tattoo parlour, which survived six series and gave Abraham the kind of long-term success required by the voracious US TV market.

Returning to the UK in 2007, he faced another problem. Appointed CEO of multichannel provider UKTV (then owned by the BBC and Virgin), his task was to beef up the company's profile and reboot its channels. The solution came with the marketing masterstroke of rebranding male-skewing G2 as – you guessed it – Dave.

Abraham was lucky in nailing the zeitgeist for lads' TV, typified by shows such as *Top Gear*. Dave helped UKTV stand out from the crowd in what was becoming a very crowded sector.

"My experience in advertising gave me the confidence to make that call,"

he noted, adding: "It was a complete one-off. The brilliant thing about Dave was that it was a cracking business success." When Virgin sold its share of UKTV to US media company Scripps, Dave's popularity enhanced the price that Virgin was able to ask.

Did it make sense for BBC Studios to eventually become UKTV's sole owner? "I think there's an industrial logic to that," said Abraham.

Succeeding Andy Duncan as CEO of Channel 4, he tore up his predecessor's policy of attempting to win a public subsidy for the station and set about

driving the network forward into the fast-emerging world of digital data.

"Data is the new oil," was David Abraham's mantra. This strategy enabled Channel 4 to forge a new relationship with its audience and advertisers. In retrospect, this initiative was ahead of the curve and predated how the streamers and Sky got to know their subscribers'

tastes via their own crunching of digital data. Today, Channel 4 has 20 million registered viewers.

On the content front, Abraham won plaudits for Channel 4's high-profile coverage of the 2012 London Paralympics and, eventually, filling the enormous gap in the schedules left by *Big Brother*'s demise.

"It was bloody scary, a bit like being on an aeroplane that loses an engine," he recalled. "You're looking at the overnights and wondering where that next hit is coming from."

Despite the challenges, Abraham said he was fortunate to have had Lord Burns as Channel 4's new chairman. And, ultimately, the new CEO believed that, provided the network performed well creatively, commercial success would follow.

His experience at TLC identifying shows with the potential to survive several seasons was vital, he said.

'FILLING
THE GAP
LEFT BY "BIG
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PLANE THAT
LOSES AN
ENGINE'



Public domain

British Paralympian Tatyana McFadden: Channel 4's Paralympics coverage won plaudits

Working alongside his chief creative officer, Jay Hunt – now at Apple TV – Abraham successfully refreshed the broadcaster thanks to shows such as *Gogglebox*, *Educating Yorkshire*, *Black Mirror* and, later, *The Great British Bake-Off*.

Poaching *Bake Off* from the BBC caused controversy, especially since Channel 4's remit was to innovate and to take risks. Abraham told the RTS that, at the time, the show was “leaving the BBC” and it was either going to go to ITV or Netflix.

“That would have hurt us [commercially],” he explained. “What we understood, rather brilliantly, was how to refresh the show. When you have a hit, it's a real dilemma, [how] to keep it fresh.

“As a result of the changes that were made, audiences felt that they could fall back in love with the show for another few years.”

He added to audience laughter: “On every level, that was brilliantly executed – although I think Jay and I were the only people in the country who thought that for a few days.”

Which brings us to Abraham's latest venture, the immodestly named Wonderhood Studios.

The company is breaking the mould by making high-quality commercials and TV content, and seeking to find

synergies between both activities. The venture has got off to a promising start. An ad made by Wonderhood promoting Comic Relief, starring Peter Mullan as a granddad caring for his newborn grandson, was recently selected as one of *Campaign's* top 10 ads of 2019. To produce a commercial with this level of emotional engagement is unusual.

Its message struck a chord, as the film suggested that, despite the divisions of Brexit, we all have much more in common – not least the capacity for giving to charity – than the things that separate us.

At the moment, Wonderhood is concentrating on factual shows. Its first documentary, in which Heston Blumenthal revealed some of his darkest thoughts, was shown on BBC Two in December. Provided the company continues to find investors, a move into drama looks possible.

For someone who likes to shake up existing models, Abraham's ambition for his latest venture sounds refreshingly straightforward: “Whatever I've done, my ambition is to do great work.” ■

Report by Steve Clarke. The RTS London Christmas Lecture with David Abraham was held at the Cavendish Conference Centre in London on 4 December. The producer was Terry Marsh.

Abraham on...

... Relocating C4 outside London

Did you spend so much time fighting privatisation that, when relocating Channel 4 became an issue, you were still stuck in battle mode?

‘It's definitely something people have said. I'm not a historian. Other people will write that up,’ replied David Abraham. ‘Remember, we were in that weird period when we went into another general election [2017] where the Conservative manifesto said, “We will not privatise Channel 4 but we will forcibly relocate the entire organisation”...

‘No one had come to talk to me or the board about that.

‘After that election, we entered into a conversation about the art of the possible.

‘By then, I had decided that it was time to move on. I worked as diligently as I was able to in order to provide a toolbox of analysis that the team subsequently used to make the decisions they made after I left.’

He added: ‘The thing I was very vocal on was forcibly moving the whole of the organisation. I'm really pleased that didn't happen. I think Channel 4 is quite a delicate thing.

‘The interaction between sales, marketing and content is carefully stitched together.... In the circumstances, I think that what has happened is a good outcome.’

... Protecting British creativity

‘The British creative culture is very distinct. American creative culture is brilliant, but American corporate culture can be problematic.’

... The survival of linear-TV

‘In 10 years' time linear-TV will be distributed by IPTV, but scheduled TV will still be important; this more passive way of consuming curated content will have a very important role, not least in news and entertainment.’

The soap sage



Writer and producer Mal Young has revealed how he made \$200,000 in a few seconds – by swearing. The showrunner, whose credits range from *Brookside* and *EastEnders* to *Holby City* and *Doctor Who*, was giving an RTS Midlands drama production masterclass in Birmingham, where he explained the process of piloting a show in the hyper-competitive US TV market.

He had moved to Los Angeles after leaving the BBC, where he was responsible for such programmes as *EastEnders* and *Casualty*. In 2008, Young pitched a drama, *Austin Golden Hour*, to the CW Network. The storyline was based on a group of young Texan paramedics trying to save lives in the vital hour following traumatic injury. He explained: “It played out in real time, like *24* meets *ER*. I wrote 18 drafts of the pilot script, which is about average.

“They rang me to say the pilot had been green-lit but said it was going to be low budget – only \$2.8m. I said, ‘Fucking hell!’, meaning ‘That much?’ But they thought I was complaining and said, ‘Oh, let’s go with \$3m’. It’s the easiest \$200,000 I’ve ever made.”

Stunts were elaborate and, by British standards, expensive, and the show was immediately subjected to some

Drama

Mal Young, who gave British viewers soap’s first lesbian kiss, treats the RTS to a drama masterclass

thorough market research. “We blew things up and had helicopters,” Young recalled. “We finished the final cut at noon. At 2:00pm, they showed it to a panel of people paid to give their opinions on every line of dialogue and what the characters were wearing.

“The channel [executives] watched from behind a glass wall and said ‘Cut that scene’ if it didn’t get a good reaction. It was all very picked over and horrible. It took a year of my life and \$3m. Then, they just said: ‘No, we’re not going with it.’”

**‘THEY WANTED TO
[BRING PEOPLE]
BACK FROM THE
DEAD... ALMOST
EVERY WEEK’**

Young noted that, on average, a network such as CBS takes 600 pitches a season and buys up to 200 scripts. Of those, 15 are made into pilots. Five are picked up for a series. Two or three might make it past episode 3 before the show is axed.

He added: “It is changing, though. Streaming channels bypass the pilot system because it’s so expensive, and go straight to series, relying on big-name writers and stars. I can be sitting in reception, waiting to pitch, next to Reese Witherspoon and Laura Dern with their production companies.

“Pitching is tough. They ask: ‘Why this, why now and why you?’ And you have to answer robustly with why you should write it. They are brutally honest, stopping you mid-pitch to say, ‘It’s not for us’. You have to grow a thick skin.

“A lot of people, especially in the US, think there’s a magic formula to good drama, but it doesn’t exist. The best dramas break all the rules. Look at *Succession*, my favourite show of the past year.

“Every character is hateful, which shouldn’t work, but somehow it makes us care about this screwed-up family. And, all the time, it shows bad people getting away with horrible things.”

Young, 62, started as a graphic designer for Littlewoods in his native Liverpool but was besotted by television. At 27, he got a job as an extra on



Brookside, radical in 1994

Channel 4

the new Channel 4 soap, *Brookside*, playing a taxi driver, before becoming a runner at Mersey Television and working his way up to producer.

He remembered: “*Corrie* started when I was three and my mum watched every single episode until the day she died. The TV was my babysitter and my window on the world. I was obsessed by TV and I still am. I’m an addict. My training was watching TV.”

Young came up with two of *Brookside*’s most controversial storylines – the lesbian kiss and the body under the patio. The famous kiss between Anna Friel and Nicola Stephenson looks so innocent now, but it caused huge ructions in 1994 as UK TV’s first pre-watershed lesbian kiss.

“It captured something and crossed a line,” said Young. “The *Daily Mail* called for my resignation. One woman accused me of teaching her daughter how to be a lesbian. Years later, it was part of the 2012 Olympics opening ceremony, so it was shown in countries that had originally banned it. It was thrilling that it was having an impact again.”

He explained: “Soaps are organically born out of a particular time. You can’t just cynically say ‘Let’s create one’, that’s too formulaic and it won’t work. That’s what happened with *Eldorado*. When I got to the BBC, they were still reeling from that – they called it the E word.

“They’d thrown £10m at it and built

a village in Spain but it just wasn’t good enough. Viewers could smell the cynicism. They lost all their confidence and it damaged BBC drama for many years.”

Twenty years after he shook up UK soaps, he did the same to a US stalwart, CBS’s *The Young and the Restless*. He was showrunner for three years and oversaw 700 episodes of the number-one-rated daytime soap.

“When I got there, it was in its 44th year and felt very old-fashioned,” said Young. “I introduced the first writers room and took the action beyond the sound stage for the first time, with hand-held and single cameras. It was very driven by logistics, having to keep moving all the time to make six episodes in four days.

“I ruffled a few feathers. I had domestic abuse storylines and a lesbian kiss 20 years after I did them on *Brookside*, but it was all new and shocking to them.

“I know I brought Dirty Den back from the dead in *EastEnders*, but they wanted to do it with characters almost every week on *The Young and the Restless*.

“I reined that in, and drew the line at doppelgängers and evil twins. The one thing they wouldn’t let me get rid of was the music. It’s all scored, and they even used to have an orchestra in the corner playing live. It seemed very schlocky to me but they insisted the music stayed.”

Young left the soap earlier this year. He is now pitching new dramas in the UK and US, and working with former soap writer and RTS award-winner Daran Little on a new drama to be set and filmed in Birmingham.

“It was either going to be set here or in Liverpool, but it felt better in Birmingham,” he told the RTS audience. “We’re very hopeful it will get made.”

Perhaps one of Young’s biggest successes was overseeing the return of *Doctor Who* in 2005, after a gap of 16 years, but it almost didn’t happen.

He revealed: “I knew it couldn’t look like it used to, it had to be high budget. We didn’t have enough money to make it properly, so Russell T Davies and I took it round all the US companies, and they all rejected us. They wouldn’t touch us, even Syfy, which ended up buying it from us rather than being a co-producer.

“We needed £800,000 to make a good-looking *Doctor Who* episode but we could only get £500,000. For the first time ever in my career, I said, ‘Don’t worry about the budget’. I knew it would do well and they could sell it to get the money back. And I was leaving, so what could they do, fire me?” ■

Report by Roz Laws. Mal Young was in conversation with Dorothy Hobson, who also produced the masterclass at the IET in Birmingham on 29 November.

A labour of love

Drama production

Creative collaboration was key to bringing *His Dark Materials* to the screen, hears an RTS audience

Everyone who has ever worked in television knows that one of the essential qualities required to produce outstanding TV is the ability to collaborate.

At an RTS discussion, held in early December with key members of the production team of BBC One's ambitious *His Dark Materials*, the extent to which different groups worked together to complete the series was made abundantly clear.

"Jane [executive producer Jane Tranter and co-founder of Bad Wolf, the show's producer] uses the term 'Loving it on to the screen,'" noted the VFX supervisor on *His Dark Materials*, Russell Dodgson, creative director of Framestore.

He told his new colleagues from the beginning that working in isolation was not an option. As pre-production got under way, Dodgson made it clear to them that the only way *His Dark Materials* would work was "if you don't treat us as a vendor that is going to deliver shots".

He asked them to "let us into the process and get us involved in the script process. Get us in the mix.

"From day one, they were true to their word. This meant that we could focus on the characterisation of the daemons and do that with a lot of trust – which allowed us to squeeze every penny on to the screen."

For fans of Philip Pullman's books, one of the delights of the series is the animated daemons (animal representations of the characters' souls) painstakingly assembled by Dodgson's team of digital animators.

He admitted: "I didn't know if it was doable. In this show, there is an unprecedented amount of creature-based special effects without an unprecedented budget. And that is a bit of a game changer."

Fellow panellist, writer Jack Thorne, who adapted Pullman's stories for the screen, told the RTS how he, too, approached the project as very much a collective endeavour.

He said: "It's not me alone at my desk but a lot of people working together. That's what makes these shows. Largely, it was the six of us talking [the sixth key individual, script editor Xandria Horton, was absent from the panel] and working out how to do it. Then I'd go away and write it."

Production designer Joel Collins referred to the show's "group mind" and "the importance of the group relationship". He emphasised: "A show like this involves a very big set of relationships. There's a lot of trust involved – a lot of to-ing and fro-ing.

"I'd feed Jack the visual information and the scripts would feed back into the visuals. It was a kind of tag team six months before the show was green-lit."

Tranter, a former head of BBC drama, explained how she'd wanted to make *His Dark Materials* for TV since the first book of the trilogy, *Northern Lights*, was published in 1995.

"If you read them, it was not a big step to think: we could make this for television. But, when these books were published, TV was way behind feature film," she said.

When Tranter originally asked about the rights, she discovered they had



His Dark Materials

been bought by New Line Cinema. In fact, after the disappointing 2007 feature film *The Golden Compass*, starring Nicole Kidman and based on *Northern Lights*, many people thought that turning *His Dark Materials* into compelling TV was mission impossible.

She claims she felt relieved, reasoning that a TV series made then would have been a perfectly good BBC TV Sunday teatime series, but her ambitions were greater.

Despite the rights being unavailable, she continued to think about adapting the stories. She was encouraged when the film rights weren't picked up for the second and third books.

She recalled: "I began to circle like a shark waiting for blood. I was lucky enough to be in LA at the time. A few drops of blood began to appear and I went for it."

Game of Thrones was the decisive factor in taking Pullman's work and putting it on the small screen. "*Game of Thrones* showed us what we could do on TV. It was a game changer, due to



'WE DID
46 DRAFTS OF
EPISODE 1...
IT'S HARD TO
DO JUSTICE
TO GENIUS'

BBC

the way it did visual effects on TV," said Tranter.

"I never doubted that we could do it, because I knew that people like this [pointing towards the rest of the panel] would make it happen. All I had to do was find them."

Securing Thorne's services was a vital part of the development process. But the in-demand screenwriter, described by *The Economist* recently as akin to British TV's Charles Dickens, needed convincing.

Not only was his wife, Rachel, pregnant, he was preoccupied by writing the stage play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*. A four-and-a-half-hour conversation with Tranter persuaded him that this was an offer he couldn't refuse.

"I loved the books so much," he said. "We did 46 drafts of episode 1 because we struggled to find the correct path. It's hard to do justice to genius."

Turning Pullman's magical world into multi-episode TV was also challenging for production designer Collins, who had worked with Dodgson on

Black Mirror. As Collins explained, much of *His Dark Materials* was filmed indoors on purpose-built sets at Wolf Studios in Cardiff. Location filming took place in the Brecon Beacons and Iceland.

"What you see in the show is mostly built, which is a testament to Bad Wolf and the idea of filming in a studio," he said. "The Oxford rooms are mostly fabricated. Oxford didn't have that magic we needed to create another world."

The difficulties involved in producing *His Dark Materials* were all the greater because, once the series was given the go-ahead, a decision was taken to film two series (based on *Northern Lights* and *The Subtle Knife* novels, respectively) back to back.

It remains to be seen whether there will be a third season. Tranter hopes that as many as six more TV adaptations of the writer's work could eventually be made by Bad Wolf.

Her confidence in the project was such that filming began before *His Dark Materials'* main co-producer, HBO, was

on board. "The BBC trusted Bad Wolf to go out and raise the rest of the money," she said, adding: "The BBC is one of the few broadcasters in the world that makes shows that are equivalent to this, programmes such as *Blue Planet* and *Planet Earth*."

"I don't think *His Dark Materials* has got a neighbour in British television in terms of its production values and themes, which are on an adult scale but can be enjoyed by audiences from nine years old to 90."

She emphasised: "Rather than think you've got all the answers, you need humility when you approach a project like this. The other way, absolute disaster lies. You need a mix of confidence, passion and fear."

And, of course, teamwork. ■

Report by Steve Clarke. The RTS screening of *His Dark Materials* episode 6 followed by a Q&A session took place at London's Mayfair Hotel on 5 December. The panelists were interviewed by journalist and broadcaster Caroline Frost.



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RTS Masterclasses 2019

RTS Craft Skills Masterclasses 2019

Editing

Matthew Gray

Editor and

Emma Lysaght

Editor

Editors Emma Lysaght and Matthew Gray spoke about how they had each worked with distinguished programme-makers, Louis Theroux and Shane Meadows, respectively.

Lysaght, a documentary specialist, worked on Louis Theroux's *Altered States: Choosing Death*, in which terminally ill people prepared to take their own lives.

"It's a sad subject but, within those dark moments, there is always some lightness," she recalled. "When I first Skyped Louis, I was terrified. He asked me what I thought the film was about. I said it was about the strength of

humanity and love." She added: "In the edit process, he's amazing. I didn't know how controlling he would be – it's a Louis Theroux film, after all. But he was incredibly open."

Gray, the recent winner of an RTS Craft & Design award for Meadows' *The Virtues*, shown on Channel 4, first worked with the director on *This Is England '90*. "Shane's work is very personal, autobiographical. You have to be sensitive to the material and see if you can take it to places that perhaps you didn't expect it to go to.

"Sometimes, that feeds back into what's going on. He's got a very clear idea of what he's looking for."

Lysaght's father was a film editor, so she grew up watching him cut film. Even so, establishing herself as a successful editor was challenging: "It was quite a male environment, I was very nervous and very shy. I didn't get into the cutting room until I was 19.

"My dad knew of one female editor. She needed an assistant, so I stepped in and became her assistant."

Gray read philosophy of film at the University of Leeds, before working as a runner at Yorkshire Television (YTV) and then being offered a post as an editor. "I was thrown in at the deep end and had loads of time to edit material. I was at YTV for... three years and then

went freelance, working at Warp Films [maker of Meadows' films]."

Lysaght and Gray were interviewed by Ruth Pitt, director of the Creative Cities Convention.

Sound

Matt Bacon

Sound recordist and location sound supervisor and

Kate Davis

Head of sound at Directors Cut Films

Matt Bacon records sound on location, often having to battle the noise of the modern world to obtain a pure track. "We strive to do as best we can. Sometimes... we have to compromise," he admitted to former factual programme-maker Helen Scott. "On a daytime show, you're going to be less concerned about it than in a period drama, where you cannot have a plane flying [overhead]."

Mumbling actors or poor sound? "A



From left: Nell Butler,
Mike Robinson and
Sara Deane

Camera

Sara Deane

Director of photography

Mike Robinson

Cinematographer

Drama specialist Sara Deane studied at Bournemouth Film School and the National Film and Television School, whereas documentary cinematographer Mike Robinson was self-taught. “I blagged my way in as a camera assistant,” said the Emmy award-winner (for *Ten Days to D-Day*), “and I learned on the job”.

Robinson, who runs Man Friday Films with his identical twin brother and fellow documentary cameraman, Steve, specialises in single-camera shoots. “Whenever you film anything in the factual world... you affect what you are filming,” he said. “[With] a single camera, you are as discreet as you can be and the impact on what you’re filming is as little as possible... Allow the action to unfold – generally, people forget you’re there within minutes of [starting] filming.”

Zombie movie *Anna and the Apocalypse*, which was shot by Deane, is at the other end of the spectrum. For one musical number, she ordered 800 coloured bulbs to light the scene; and planned every shot meticulously.

Discussing the cinematographer’s creative influence on a drama, she said: “I come to a [project] with my own ideas but, essentially, there is one person – the director – who is running the show. My [role] is to understand their vision. Before we get anywhere near the set, we will spend a lot of time together talking through ideas... [I try] to enhance their project – if you’re not working together, you will always be in a battle.”

The best photojournalism and street photography offer valuable lessons to the cinematographer. “Seeing how a moment is captured when the composition is just perfect... I try to learn from that,” said Robinson.

“When I get a script,” said Deane, “I will spend quite a few days watching films... so that I can send a load of references to the director.”

Deane and Robinson were in conversation with factual entertainment executive Nell Butler.

RTS Student Programme Masterclasses 2019

Comedy

Nerys Evans

Creative director of comedy, *Expectation*

Nerys Evans, creative director of comedy at independent producer *Expectation*, explained how she had worked her way up from secretarial work at the BBC to become one of the UK’s top comedy TV practitioners.

At the BBC, she produced *Miranda*, *Jonathan Creek* and *French and Saunders*, while at Channel 4 she commissioned shows such as *Catastrophe*, *Flowers* and *Derry Girls*.

“I’m from a very small town in Wales,” Evans told Sarah Asante, session chair and commissioning editor for BBC Comedy. “No one I knew ever worked in TV. I had no in. I just followed my dream and worked really hard to get my foot in the door.”

She’d always been obsessed by comedy. As a student at Liverpool John Moores University, where she read politics, Evans got involved with the student radio station. “There were comedy shows on the radio, so I worked with a lot of comedians. After university, I joined the management agency Avalon as a receptionist. I thought I’d won the lottery because I could go and see lots of live comedy for free.”

Her next job was at the BBC, as a PA in the comedy department, working for *Little Britain* producer Myfanwy Moore. “It was an extraordinary insight into the editorial process of comedy,” she recalled.

Evans then joined Comic Relief, before becoming an associate producer for BBC producer Jo Sargent, whose shows included *French and Saunders* and *Ab Fab*.

“I learnt a huge amount from working with her,” said Evans. “Jo had put Miranda Hart in a *French and Saunders* sketch. She was brilliant and I ended up doing the pilot for *Miranda*. ▶

lot of the time, the recordist isn’t to blame – a lot of artists do mumble,” insisted Bacon. “Part of our role is to say, ‘We can’t hear them; I’d like another [take]. Often, you are overruled.”

He went on to warn: “You can repair [poor sound] in the edit, but it will take you longer and cost you more.”

“If we’ve got good sound, we’ll use it,” said Kate Davis, who mixes sound in post-production. “But, a lot of the time, we can make it better if we add something. Obviously, it depends on the budget how much time we have to accentuate the soundtrack.”

“Dialogue is the most important thing in any soundtrack,” she added. “If you can’t hear the dialogue, then you might as well not bother [watching].”

Smooth sound is the objective of the dubbing mixer. “It’s not just about making any clip as clean as possible, it’s about smoothing it into all the elements [of the show], so the sound washes over your head,” said Davis. “Sound is so subliminal – I don’t want anyone to ever think about what I’ve done.”

Sound technology has changed dramatically during the duo’s working careers. “But”, cautioned Bacon, “while the equipment is getting smaller, cheaper, lighter and more complex, technology will only take you so far – trust your ears.”

› “It was a big, brave thing to do. Phoebe Waller-Bridge takes all the credit for talking straight to camera, but we did it on *Miranda*, which was a story of a woman who felt out of place but was trying to be herself.”

On the difference between being a producer and a commissioner, she said: “As a producer, you’re first in, last out. Your DNA is in every part of the show... As a commissioner, you’re part of the creative process, but you don’t get your hands dirty. You don’t go home and cry.”

News

Rageh Omaar International affairs editor, ITV News

Rageh Omaar is international affairs editor, ITV News, and one of British TV’s most distinguished foreign correspondents. He reported on the invasion of Iraq and the fall of Baghdad in 2003 for the BBC, and won a Bafta for his BBC coverage of the invasion of Afghanistan, where he was the only western TV journalist to report from Taliban-held Kabul.

Educated at Oxford, where he read history, he was born in Somalia, having moved to the UK as a child. Omaar told the students not to be put off if their families had no contacts in journalism.

“There were no other journalists in the family.... Journalism is very hard to get into without contacts. It is still a somewhat opaque calling,” he said.

Dedication and hard work reap dividends, as does the ability to work as part of a team. “Viewers don’t realise that reporters don’t just pop up in global hot spots and start reporting. Nothing could be further from the truth,” he said.

“They’re only there, able to operate and, hopefully, stay safe because of the

local fixers. These are journalists who work as local production staff to support international news crews. Without them, to quote our Prime Minister, we’d be dead in a ditch, literally. They’re our guardian angels and know the places that have to be avoided.”

Omaar has seen the horrors of war many times. In these situations, it is vital that reporters keep their emotions in check: “You always have to think practically when you’re telling a story. What you’re witnessing on the ground may be heartbreaking, but you’re always thinking: ‘What shall we film?’”

“It’s not callous, but, when you’re at the centre of a humanitarian crisis, such as the drought in Somalia, you have to make calculated decisions about what would look good on TV and get you more time on the bulletin.

“Of course, you empathise [with the victims] but, at the same time, you have to think: ‘How can I make this story come to life so that people back in the UK can relate to it?’”

Rageh Omaar was interviewed by Nuala McGovern, who works for the BBC World Service.



From left: Carolyn Reynolds, Daniel Fajemisin-Duncan and Marlon Smith

Drama

Daniel Fajemisin-Duncan

Writer

Marlon Smith

Writer

South Londoners Daniel Fajemisin-Duncan and Marlon Smith started writing together at sixth-form college. “We discovered we were very much into movies; not just watching them but actually wanting to make them – and, specifically, to write them,” recalled Fajemisin-Duncan.

“It was mainly Tarantino [-style] monologues,” added Smith. “Spike Lee was also a big thing for both of us, especially *Do the Right Thing*.” Their break came with the gritty Channel 4 drama *Run*, which starred Olivia Colman and Lennie James – and went on



'YOU GET VERY EMOTIONALLY INVOLVED AND YOU NEED TO HARNESS THAT'

One, which used to make a lot of *Cutting Edge* [documentaries] for Channel 4."

Cary's break in documentary came with a *Cutting Edge* film about four eight-year-olds going to boarding school, *Leaving Home at 8*, which Cary developed and worked on as an assistant producer.

BBC Two doc *Louis Theroux: Savile*, Cary's first major directing job, revisited Theroux's relationship with the monstrous DJ, first captured a decade and a half earlier in *When Louis Met... Jimmy*.

"You get very emotionally involved and you need to harness that – films that I make are as much a reflection of my emotional response to a subject as they are an intellectual response," admitted Cary. "You don't want to shut off emotion; equally, you need to be able to function while you're making films."

Discussing *The Last Survivors*, Cary said: "I'm not Jewish, so I felt a responsibility as an outsider making this film.... You're really struck... at how important it is to the community to make films that chime with how they feel and do justice to the subject."

Film-makers have to represent their contributors fairly: "[They] watch it before it is broadcast.... They don't have editorial control, but they can check for factual inaccuracy and fairness.... You [have] a responsibility to make something they feel is fair and an honest reflection of [their] story."

Documentary film-making, he added, can be relentless: "You're thinking about it 24/7.... there's no separation and that can be tiring. You need a break... [to] start engaging with the world [again]... to work out what you want to make a film about next."

Arthur Cary was interviewed by the film-maker and creative director of True Vision Yorkshire, Anna Hall. ■

Reports by Matthew Bell and Steve Clarke. The RTS Masterclasses were held on 5-6 November at IET Savoy Place, in central London, and were produced by Helen Scott.

Paul Hampartsoumian

to win an RTS writing award. It told "stories about people that we grew up with. At that time, they were seldom seen on screen and, in some respects, still aren't," said Fajemisin-Duncan.

Sky Atlantic series *Save Me* followed: "[Lennie] had three scripts and we worked with him to plot out the rest of the series, and wrote episode 4 as well," continued Fajemisin-Duncan. They have just finished working on series 2, *Save Me Too*.

Success in the UK has caught the attention of studios in the US, where the writing duo have two movies in development. But Smith admitted that they had had disappointments – "things that we've developed for a couple of years have never made it to the screen".

"We have similar tastes – I think that's important when you're looking for a partner to work with," he added.

"We work together, plotting and outlining... and then we carve that up into an act structure and go away and write," said Fajemisin-Duncan. "We come back together and critique, and come to a consensus on what the rewrite will be. I rewrite what Marlon

has done and he rewrites mine, and you keep doing that until it finished."

"We're friends... I've known [Daniel] since I was 12 or 13," said Smith. "We do have disagreements and it helps that we can have an all-out, crazy argument and be joking a couple of minutes later."

Daniel Fajemisin-Duncan and Marlon Smith were interviewed by drama producer Carolyn Reynolds.

Documentary

Arthur Cary Documentary film-maker

Arthur Cary tackles difficult subjects in his work, which includes BBC Two Holocaust documentary *The Last Survivors*, with great sensitivity.

His first job in television was at Endemol, as a runner on the reality shows *Celebrity Scissorhands* and *Big Brother*: "I exploited every connection I had at Endemol and got a job at North



RTS Craft & Design Awards 2019

Sponsored by

GRAVITY MEDIA

Hosted by Ahir Shah and sponsored by Gravity Media, the awards were presented on 25 November at the London Hilton, Park Lane

Chernobyl

Sky



Don't Forget the Driver

BBC

Costume Design – Drama

Odile Dicks-Mireaux – Chernobyl

Sister/The Mighty Mint and Word Games for Sky Atlantic and HBO

'Unflinching attention to detail and perfect characterisation, a total immersive, cinematic experience.... The collaboration between departments [was] quite extraordinary.'

Nominees:

Tom Pye and Nadine Clifford-Davern

– **Gentleman Jack**, A Lookout Point Production in association with HBO for BBC One

Charlotte Holdich – The Long Song, Heyday Television/NBC Universal for BBC One

Costume Design – Entertainment and Non Drama

Sam Perry – Don't Forget the Driver

Sister/Hootenanny for BBC Two

'The characters were believable, realistic and appealing, without falling into the trap of caricature. Wonderful attention to detail and subtlety.'

Nominees:

Orla Smyth-Mill – Brassic, Calamity Films for Sky One

Vicky Gill – Strictly Come Dancing, BBC Studios for BBC One

Design – Programme Content Sequences

Studio AKA, Steve Small, Nikki

Kefford, Artworking and Animation

Team – Black Earth Rising

Forgiving Earth for BBC Two

'[The] Striking, emotive and artistically ambitious... animations were impactful and moving... conveying upsetting events in a sensitive and beautiful way.'

Nominees:

BBC Studios with Lola Post Production

– **The Planets**, BBC Studios for BBC Two

Made in Colour – Holocaust: Finding My Family, Made in Colour for CBBC

Design – Titles

Matt Willey – Killing Eve

Sid Gentle Films and BBC America for BBC One

'A clever idea beautifully executed, with bold typography and punchy colours, perfectly reflecting the chilling nature of the programme.'

Nominees:

D8 – The Cry, Synchronicity Films for BBC One

Ben Hanbury, Hugo Moss, Paul

McDonnell and Tamsin McGee – The

ABC Murders, Mammoth Screen Ltd/Agatha Christie Productions for BBC One

Design – Trails and Packaging

BBC Sport, BBC Creative and Park

Pictures – Fifa Women's World

Cup 2019

BBC Sport, BBC Creative and Park Pictures for BBC Sport

'Gutsy, modern, dynamic and, most importantly, memorable, this well-thought-out campaign unapologetically placed women's football centre stage.'

Nominees:

BBC Creative – BBC Two rebrand, Superunion for BBC Two

Nick Meikle, Sarah Gerona, Laura Whittell and Natalie Fox – Dynasties, BBC Studios Creative for BBC One and BBC Earth

Director – Comedy Drama/ Situation Comedy

Nida Manzoor – Enterprice

Fudge Park Productions for BBC Three

'Mining comedy from small moments and real environments, a limited budget did not hold it back from achieving a truly distinct and memorable style.'

Nominees:

Tom Kingsley – Ghosts, Monumental Television in association with Them There for BBC One

Alex Winckler – This Way Up, Merman Television Ltd for Channel 4



Director – Documentary/ Factual and Non Drama

Wendie Ottewill – David Harewood:
Psychosis and Me

Films of Record for BBC Two

‘An invisible subject matter made visible in a powerful and emotionally engaging film that clearly evidenced sensitive and brave directing skills.’

Nominees:

Arthur Cary – *War in the Blood*, Minnow Films for BBC Two

Anthony Philipson – *8 Days: To the Moon and Back*, BBC Studios for BBC Two

Director – Drama

Shane Meadows – *The Virtues*

Warp Films for Channel 4

‘It felt completely real and was head and shoulders above anything else.’

Nominees:

Toby Haynes – *Brexit: The Uncivil War*, House Productions for Channel 4

Johan Renck – *Chernobyl*, Sister/The Mighty Mint and Word Games for Sky Atlantic and HBO

RTS Special Award

Sky AdSmart

‘Over the course of TV history there have been many significant technological milestones, but very few led by an advertising development.’

‘What was originally planned as a project to deliver relevant promos, evolved into a seven-year, £100m project that fundamentally changed TV advertising for good.’

‘A major technical achievement able to seamlessly, with frame-by-frame accuracy, replace ads in live, linear content across millions of homes simultaneously... effectively turning set-top boxes into local ad servers.’

‘Addressable TV has democratised the advertising landscape.... It has delivered on its promise to make TV advertising available to businesses of all shapes and sizes. Channel 4 and BBC will use the technology, too.’



The Virtues

Channel 4

Director – Multicamera

Bridget Caldwell – *The Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance*

BBC Studios for BBC One

‘Very sympathetic direction wonderfully captured all the action to bring the audience a mesmerising experience.’

Nominees:

Nick Wood – *Not Going Out*, Avalon Television for BBC One

Marcus Viner – *Jazz 625 Live: For One Night Only*, Somethin’ Else for BBC Four

Editing – Documentary/Factual

Claire Guillon – *Egon Schiele: Dangerous Desires*

BBC Studios PQP for BBC Two

‘The breathtaking and wonderfully anarchic style of editing brought a 100-year-old subject instantaneously and convincingly into the 21st century.’

Nominees:

Sunshine Jackson – *100 Vaginas*, Burning Bright for Channel 4

John Steventon and Ed Horne – *Sacred Wonders*, BBC Studios PQP for BBC One

Editing – Drama

Matthew Gray – *The Virtues*

Warp Films and Big Arty Productions for Channel 4

‘At times it was hard to watch, for all the right reasons.... Flashback material at just the right points [hinted] at the reasons for the lead character’s actions.’

Nominees:

Gary Dollner – *Killing Eve (Series 1)*, Sid Gentle Films and BBC America for BBC One

Matthew Cannings – *Brexit: The Uncivil War*, House Productions for Channel 4

Editing – Entertainment and Comedy

Simon Whitcombe and Christine Pancott – *The Heist*

Shine TV for Sky One

‘A visual assault on the senses. A technically challenging edit... demonstrating it to be the model of how to do this sort of thing without putting a step wrong.’

Nominees:

Mike Holliday – *Ghosts*, Monumental Television in association with Them There for BBC One

Tom Hemmings – *Don’t Forget the Driver*, Sister/Hootenanny for BBC Two

Editing – Sport

Lukas Musil and David Snowdon – *Uefa Champions League Final – Official Film*, IMG Media for Uefa/BT Sport

‘Great storytelling, classy, clever, ambitious and with brilliant shot selection.’

Nominees:

Joe Snell, Tim Mackenzie-Smith, Jay Gill, Pete Burton and Frank Callaghan – *Women’s World Cup*, Input Media (now renamed Gravity Media) for BBC Sport

Kevin Evans, Ian Grech, Joe Snell, Mike Osborn and Jordan Buckingham, BT Sport – *Wretch 32: Road to Madrid 2019: Uefa Champions League Final VT, (SDR Production)*, BT Sport ➤





1 Costume Design – Drama: *Chernobyl*

2 Costume Design – Entertainment and Non Drama: *Don't Forget the Driver*

3 Design – Programme Content Sequences: *Black Earth Rising*

4 Design – Titles: *Killing Eve*

5 Design – Trails and Packaging: *Fifa Women's World Cup 2019*

6 Director – Comedy Drama/Situation Comedy: *Enterprise*

7 Director – Documentary/Factual and Non Drama: *David Harewood: Psychosis and Me*

8 Director – Drama: *The Virtues*

9 RTS Special Award: Sky AdSmart

Host: Ahir Shah

All pictures: Richard Kendal



The Bay

Make Up Design – Entertainment and Non Drama

Lisa Armstrong – *Strictly Come Dancing*

BBC Studios for BBC One

‘Consistently impressing audiences and fans, never failing to entertain and constantly exhibiting an amazingly varied array of skills and techniques.’

Nominees:

Bean Ellis – *Don’t Forget the Driver*, Sister/Hootenanny for BBC Two

Jo Jenkins – *Year of the Rabbit*, Objective Fiction for Channel 4

Lifetime Achievement Award

Mike McCarthy



Richard Kendal

‘Our winner was a BBC staffer at the dawn of Television Centre’s construction. He has since become an incredibly popular freelancer. In a career spanning six decades, he has worked on an incredible list of shows.’

‘We have heard so much praise for his professionalism, for his willingness to make things work with the minimum fuss: “He’s the best of the best”; “An absolute legend”; “The Peter Pan of sound designers”. And, to this day, he still has a hand in the sound of Saturday-night television.’

Effects

One of Us – The OA: Part II

Plan B Entertainment for Netflix

‘The originality of thought, the attention to detail and the design aesthetic that went into... all the on-screen effects were hugely impressive.’

Nominees:

Effects Team – *Les Misérables*, A Lookout Point/BBC Studios Production, co-produced with Masterpiece for BBC One

Axis Studios – *Happy! (Season 2)*, NBC-Universal/Netflix UK for Syfy

Lighting for Multicamera

Tim Routledge – *Stormzy: Glastonbury*

Tawbox for BBC

‘The boldness of creative choices created a very special performance.’

Nominees:

Nigel Catmur – *The Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance*, BBC Studios for BBC One

Tim Routledge – *Chris: Live from the Salle Pleyel*, Done and Dusted for Apple Music

Make-Up Design – Drama

Daniel Parker, *Chernobyl*

Sister/The Mighty Mint and Word Games for Sky Atlantic and HBO

‘Painstakingly crafted... using a sleight of hand and subtlety that sensitively portrayed the devastating tragedy.’

Nominees:

Lin Davie – *Gentleman Jack*, A Lookout Point Production in association with HBO for BBC One

Meinir Jones-Lewis – *The Durrells*, Sid Gentle Films for ITV

Music – Original Score

Hildur Guðnadóttir – *Chernobyl*

Sister/The Mighty Mint and Word Games for Sky Atlantic and HBO

‘The score was utterly unique, totally integral to the drama and, as a result, completely terrifying.’

Nominees:

Murray Gold – *Years and Years*, Red Production Company for BBC One

Isobel Waller-Bridge – *Fleabag*, Two Brothers Pictures for BBC Three

Music – Original Title

Samuel Sim – *The Bay*

Tall Story Pictures for ITV

‘Haunting and atmospheric, this beautiful theme lent an ominous quality to the opening montage. The music gave a Nordic noir feel to Morecambe.’

Nominees:

Lorne Balfe – *The Cry*, Synchronicity Films for BBC One

Nainita Desai – *Extraordinary Rituals*, BBC Natural History Unit for BBC Two

Multicamera Work

Giuseppe Bianchi – *Master of Photography*

Ballandi and Sky Arts Production Hub for Sky Arts

‘The multicamera work and planning brought life to the subject matter.’

Nominees:

Paul Dugdale and Simon Fisher – *Taylor Swift: Reputation Stadium Tour*, Den of Thieves for Netflix

Camera Team – *The Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance*, BBC Studios for BBC One



1 Director – Multicamera: *The Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance*

4 Editing – Entertainment and Comedy: *The Heist*

7 Lighting for Multicamera: *Stormzy: Glastonbury*

2 Editing – Documentary/Factual: Egon Schiele: *Dangerous Desires*

5 Editing – Sport: *Uefa Champions League Final – Official Film*

8 Make Up Design – Entertainment and Non Drama: *Strictly Come Dancing*

3 Editing – Drama: *The Virtues*

6 Effects: *The OA: Part II*

9 Sound – Entertainment and Non Drama: *Married To a Paedophile*

All pictures: Richard Kendal



Black Earth Rising

BBC

Multicamera Work – Sport

Rhys Edwards, Matt Roberts and Laura McManamon – *SailGP*

Whisper and BT Sport

‘Brilliant to see something of this scale delivered so well. Made the event enthralling to watch and exciting to follow.’

Nominees:

Matthew Griffiths – *Six Nations: Wales vs England*, BBC Sport for BBC One

Andrew Clement – *Wimbledon 2019: Men’s Final*, BBC Sport and Wimbledon Broadcast Services for BBC

Photography – Documentary/Factual and Non Drama

Daniel Dewsbury, Stuart Bernard and Jonny Ashton – *The Mighty Redcar*

72 Films for BBC Two

‘The strikingly executed photography subverts expectations by giving the town and its characters an evocative cinematic flair.’

Nominees:

Lindsay McCrae – *Dynasties: Emperor*, BBC Studios for BBC One

Arthur Cary and Johann Perry – *The Last Survivors*, Minnow Films for BBC Two

Photography – Drama and Comedy

Jakob Ihre – *Chernobyl*

Sister/The Mighty Mint and Word Games for Sky Atlantic and HBO

‘The cinematographer’s... revolutionary approach to lenses and filming techniques made this drama immediate, powerful and totally authentic.’

Nominees:

Chloë Thomson – *The Long Song*, Heyday Television/NBCUniversal for BBC One

Stuart Bentley – *I Am: Kirsty*, Me and You Productions for Channel 4

Picture Enhancement

Matt Brown – *Brassic*

Calamity Films for Sky

‘The picture enhancement was a masterclass in measured grading, using multiple layers applied on a shot-by-shot basis to create moody, yet bold, scenes that popped with colour.’

Nominees:

Aidan Farrell – *Summer of Rockets*, Little Island Productions for BBC Two

Dan Gill – *The Mighty Redcar*, 72 Films for BBC Two

Production Design – Drama

Luke Hull – *Chernobyl*

Sister/The Mighty Mint and Word Games for Sky Atlantic and HBO

‘Rich, realistic, beautiful and horrible, all at the same time. Astonishing research that was real, sensitive and with unmatched passion for design.’

Nominees:

Kristian Milsted – *Killing Eve (Series 1)*, Sid Gentle Films and BBC America for BBC One

Maria Djurkovic and Tatiana Macdonald – *The Little Drummer Girl*, The Ink Factory/BBC/AMC for BBC One

Production Design – Entertainment and Non Drama

Dominic Tolfys – *Michael McIntyre’s Big Show*

Hungry McBear for BBC One

‘The jury was blown away by the intricate set changes and impressed by the versatility of the production design.’

Nominees:

Richard Drew – *This Time with Alan Partridge*, Baby Cow Productions for BBC One

Samantha Harley – *Year of the Rabbit*, Objective Fiction for Channel 4

Sound – Drama

Stefan Henrix, Joe Beal, Harry Barnes and Michael Maroussas – *Chernobyl*

Sister/The Mighty Mint and Word Games for Sky Atlantic and HBO

‘Original use of sound design and effects that worked seamlessly with the score.’

Nominees:

Ronald Bailey, James Ridgway, Rodney Berling, Robert Brazier and Chris Roberts – *Pure*, Drama Republic for Channel 4

Nigel Edwards, Glen Marullo, Lee Critchlow and Linda Murdoch – *Black Earth Rising*, Forgiving Earth for BBC Two

Sound – Entertainment and Non Drama

Greg Gettens, Kim Tae Hak, Chad Orororo and Andy Paddon – *Married To a Paedophile*

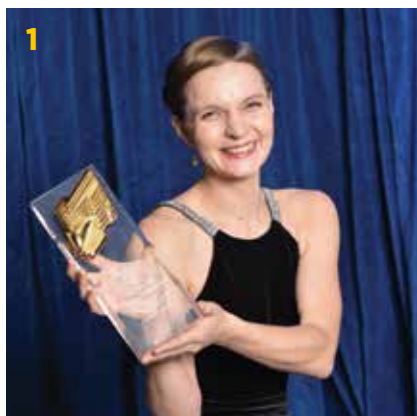
Brinkworth Films for Channel 4

‘Anyone tuning in halfway [would not have] realised that the original audio had been resynced to the actors miming. An incredible technical feat.’

Nominees:

Ben Ormerod, Marc Wojtanowski and Duncan Paterson – *8 Days: To the Moon and Back*, BBC Studios for BBC Two

Christian Henson, Paul Freeman and Adam Tandy – *Inside No 9 Live – Dead Line*, BBC Studios for BBC Two ■



All pictures: Richard Kendal

1 Music – Original Score: *Chernobyl*

2 Multicamera Work – Sport: *SailGP*

3 Photography – Documentary/Factual and Non Drama: *The Mighty Redcar*

4 Photography – Drama and Comedy: *Chernobyl*

5 Picture Enhancement: *Brassic*

6 Production Design – Drama: *Chernobyl*

7 Production Design – Entertainment and Non Drama: *Michael McIntyre's Big Show*

8 Sound – Drama: *Chernobyl*

9 Multicamera Work: *Master of Photography*



Do you need £4,000 for a history of television project?

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grant of up to £4,000
towards publishing
work on any aspect
of TV history**

Grants will be given to assist in the completion of new or unfinished projects, work or literature specific to the objectives of the Trust. 'Literature' is defined as including audio-visual media such as DVDs and websites. It is essential that applicants read all the conditions and criteria, which can be found online at the address below.

George Shiers, a distinguished US television historian, was a

long-standing member of the RTS. The Shiers Trust grant is now in its 20th year.

Application procedure

Applications are now invited and should be submitted to the Trustees by Friday **27 March 2020** on the official application form.

**[www.rts.org.uk/
shiers-trust-award](http://www.rts.org.uk/shiers-trust-award)**

Showrunners visit Falmouth

Devon and Cornwall Emma Frost and Matthew Graham – creators of historical drama *The Spanish Princess* – discussed their careers at an RTS Devon and Cornwall event in late November.

The two showrunners talked about their work, from writing episodes of UK soap staples *EastEnders* and *Casualty* to the development of hit dramas *This Life* and *Life on Mars*, to their contribution to established shows *Doctor Who* and *Shameless*.

They described television as being a writer's medium, and how their writing credits for US multinationals opened the door to their current roles as producers.

Frost adapted Philip K Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* for Amazon. It imagines that the Axis powers had won

the Second World War. She also developed the Emmy- and Golden Globe-nominated series *The White Queen*, an adaptation of Philippa Gregory's historical novels, originally commissioned by the BBC with US network Starz as a co-producer. A sequel, *The White Princess*, is now shooting its second series.

Frost and Graham spoke in detail about their most recent work – the Starz drama *The Spanish Princess* – which is currently shooting its second series. These historical shows saw the pair shift from writers to showrunners, a role that Frost described as “the creative lens for a show”.

The duo offered tips on writing and career advice to the “inspiring, clearly very talented and wonderful” student audience at



The Spanish Princess

Starz/Amazon

Falmouth University. They also discussed a writer's responsibility for creating characters that offer a

broader representation of class, race, gender and sexuality on television.

Kingsley Marshall

Bristol hosts Futures and music events

West of England The RTS Futures Festival returned for a fourth year in November, at a new venue, M Shed on Bristol's harbour-side. This year, RTS West of England partnered with Bristol Unesco City of Film and welcomed 17 companies from the creative community to meet those hoping to break into the industry.

Edinburgh TV Festival talent scheme The Network and BFI Network South West highlighted opportunities alongside indies such as Aardman, Icon Films, True to Nature and RDF West, as well as a range of post-production facilities.

A series of sold-out short

talks featured industry professionals sharing insights and passing on advice. Conservationist and presenter Niall Strawson, production co-ordinator Candice Hayden and researcher Emily Aitken discussed how to get into TV and stand out in such a competitive industry.

Other talks looked at idea generation and development, post-production and production management.

Rachel Drummond-Hay, co-founder of Drummer TV and RTS West of England Vice-Chair, said: “This year's event was as full and buzzy as ever, but we were particularly pleased with the range

of students who attended – from colleges to universities, there was representation across the region, reinforcing the message that the TV industry is inclusive and accessible to all.”

■ Later that month, Anne Miller, director of TV and film at Accorder Music Publishing, gave a wide-ranging workshop on music rights at the Square Club, Bristol.

At the RTS West of England event, she discussed copyright, the Independent Production Companies licence, fair dealing and fair use of parody.

Miller also looked to the future and advised companies

to “get smart now” – audio recognition for ads, using Soundmouse's music-recognition technology, has arrived in the UK. In the next few years, it will be extended to TV and film.

She reviewed the approaches to music open to producers, including commercial, composer, buy-out and library options, adding: “People don't think about [music] early enough in the production process.”

Miller offered advice on how to approach a composer, pointing out that composed music can become valuable IP for producers.

Suzy Lambert

North West Centre

Russell T Davies was honoured with the Judges' Award at the RTS North West Awards in late November.

The screenwriter accepted the award from Russell Tovey, who starred in his chilling dystopian drama *Years and Years*. The BBC One series, made by the Red Production Company, bagged three awards at the ceremony, which was held at the Hilton Deansgate in Manchester. *Years and Years* took the Drama award, together with acting gongs won by Rory Kinnear and Jessica Hynes.

Granada Reports also picked up three awards on the night. The ITV News programme won the Regional News Programme award for its investigation into the North West's high suicide rate, plus the prize for Digital Content. Its sports correspondent Chris Hall was named Regional News Journalist.

Timewasters – Big Talk Productions' ITV2 sitcom about a group of south London time travellers – went home with two awards: Comedy Programme and Performance in a Comedy for one of its stars, Samson Kayo.

Dragonfly's BBC One series, *Ambulance*, was another double winner, scooping the Factual Series prize and the Production – Craft award.

Coronation Street actor Rob Mallard, who plays Ken Barlow's son Daniel, won the award for Performance in a Continuing Drama, while the ITV Studios soap also took the prize for Continuing Drama Storyline for the heartbreaking death of Sinead – Daniel's wife in the programme – from cancer.

LA Productions' BBC One drama series *Moving On* won the Daytime category for the second year running.

This year's Breakthrough Talent was Callum Booth-Ford, for his performance as a transgender youth in the



Years and Years triumphs

Tony Marchant-penned ITV drama *Butterfly*.

The North West Awards were hosted by former *Coronation Street* star Sally Lindsay, who was assisted by *Hollyoaks* actor Ruby O'Donnell.

“Over the last year, there has been a huge amount of growth in the North West's TV sector and we are extremely proud of the breadth, quality and creativity of content coming out of

the region,” said RTS North West Chair Cat Lewis. “It was fantastic to celebrate the achievements of our local industry and the talented individuals within it.”

Matthew Bell

RTS North West Awards winners

Judges Award • Russell T Davies

Single Drama or Series • *Years and Years* • Red Production Company for BBC One

Performance in a Single Drama or Series – Male • Rory Kinnear: *Years and Years* • Red Production Company for BBC One

Performance in a Single Drama or Series – Female • Jessica Hynes: *Years and Years* • Red Production Company for BBC One

Scriptwriter • Nick Leather: *Mother's Day* • BBC Studios for BBC Two

Performance in a Continuing Drama • Rob Mallard: *Coronation Street* • ITV Studios for ITV

Continuing Drama Storyline • *Coronation Street: Sinead's Cancer* • ITV Studios for ITV

Comedy • *Timewasters* • Big Talk Productions for ITV2

Performance in a Comedy • Samson Kayo: *Timewasters* • Big Talk Productions for ITV2

Entertainment • Sam and Mark's *Big Friday Wind-Up* • BBC Children's for CBBC

Factual Entertainment • *Teen Mom UK* • True North Productions for MTV

Factual Series • *Ambulance* • Dragonfly for BBC One

Single Documentary • *Farther and Sun: A Dyslexic Road Trip* • Platform Productions for BBC Four

Regional News Journalist • Chris Hall • ITV News Granada Reports for ITV

Regional News • *Granada Reports: Suicide Investigation* • ITV News Granada Reports for ITV

Regional Story • *BBC North West Tonight: The Church that Changed: Lizzie's Legacy* • BBC North West Tonight for BBC One

Current Affairs • *Life After My Brother's Murder* • Blakeway North for BBC Three

Daytime Series • *Moving On* • LA Productions for BBC One

Sports • *The Kennedy Who Changed the World* • BBC Sport for BBC Two

Breakthrough Talent • Callum Booth-Ford: *Butterfly* • Red Production Company/Aeon for ITV

Children's – Pre-School • *YolanDa's Band Jam* • BBC Children's for CBeebies

Children's – School Age • *My Life: Blood Sugar Brothers* • Nine Lives Media for CBBC

Animation/Puppetry • *Clangers* • Factory Create/Coolabi for CBeebies

Digital Content • *Granada Reports* • ITV News Granada Reports for ITV

Production – Craft • *Ambulance* • Dragonfly for BBC One

Post-production • *Craft* • Mark Briscoe (audio): *The ABC Murders* • Farm Manchester for BBC One

Acting gong for Vicky McClure

Midlands Centre Nottingham-born Vicky McClure and Coventry's Guz Khan won the top acting prizes at the RTS Midlands Awards in November.

McClure won hers for her role as DI Kate Fleming in World Productions' hit BBC One police corruption thriller *Line of Duty*.

Khan not only took the Acting – Male award for his performance in Tiger Aspect's BBC Three comedy series *Man Like Mobeen*, but shared the Writer prize with co-writer Andy Milligan for the same show. The gongs brought Khan's tally to five RTS Midlands awards in just two years.

BBC director of sport Barbara Slater was awarded the Baird Medal for outstanding services to sport, particularly for championing women. The Birmingham-born executive, who represented Great Britain in gymnastics at the Montreal Olympics in 1976, celebrated a decade in the top job at BBC Sport last year.

BBC One daytime drama *Doctors*, which will mark its

20th anniversary this year, secured the Drama award.

ITV News Central journalist Matt Teale, who presents its evening news programme, won the On-screen Personality award, while BBC Midlands' Jonathan Gibson was named Journalist of the Year.

Birmingham-born poet Sue Brown, who presented BBC Four doc *The First Black Brummies*, won in the Outstanding New Talent category, and Birmingham indie Gosh! TV picked up the Popular Factual award for BBC One's *River Walks: The Severn Valley*.

TV and radio presenter Trish Adudu hosted the ceremony at Birmingham's International Convention Centre, which was attended by more than 300 guests.

"This year has been an outstanding year for the Midlands in terms of TV and digital production. The breadth and diversity of the content is a true reflection of the talent and creativity of the region," said RTS Midlands Chair Caren Davies.

Matthew Bell



Line of Duty star Vicky McClure receiving her award

Nick Robinson

RTS Midlands Awards winners

Baird Medal - Barbara Slater

Drama - *Doctors* - BBC Studios for BBC One

Acting – Female - Vicky McClure: *Line of Duty* - World Productions for BBC One

Acting – Male - Guz Khan: *Man Like Mobeen* - Tiger Aspect Productions for BBC Three

Writer - Guz Khan and Andy Milligan: *Man Like Mobeen* - Tiger Aspect Productions for BBC Three

On-Screen Personality - Matt Teale - ITV News Central

Outstanding New Talent - Sue Brown

Popular Factual - *River Walks: The Severn Valley* - Gosh! TV for BBC One

Documentary - Gemma: *My Murder* - Hey Sonny Films for BBC Three

Specialist Factual - *Surgeons: At the Edge of Life* - Dragonfly TV for BBC Two

News Programme - Midlands Pub Bombings - BBC Birmingham

Journalist of the Year - Jonathan Gibson - BBC Birmingham

Current Affairs - *The Pub Bombings* - BBC One West Midlands

Short Form - *Amazing Humans* - BBC Three, Birmingham

Digital Creativity - *EastEnders: The Real Stories* - BBC Three, Birmingham

Promotional Content - *Breck's Last Game* - Affixius Films

Craft – Production - Perjeet Aujla: *Great British Menu* - Optomen TV for BBC Two

Craft – Post-production - Peshawar Zalmi - Affixius Films

Centre rewards local community

Thames Valley Charlotte Wheeler was named Thames Valley Media Hero at the RTS centre's second annual technology and community awards in late November.

"Without the heroic passion" shown by the event director of the Media Production & Technology Show, said the judges, "it is likely that, to enjoy high-quality, world-class trade shows, we here in the UK would have to travel

to Amsterdam or Las Vegas".

Mama Youth Project, which trains young people from under-represented backgrounds to succeed in the media industry, won the Community Improvement award. Over the past 12 years, the project has trained more than 520 people from schools, colleges and homeless refugees, as well as ex-offenders.

The Production/Craft award went to TV and web

audio-visual specialist Jon Pratchett. The judges said: "Jon's knowledge is second to none. With a positive 'can-do' attitude, [he is] someone you have to have on your team."

The Thames Valley Young Technologist prize was won by Techex technical consultant Mark Couto, who was described as having "a thirst for learning and an amazing enthusiasm for getting to grips with modern technology".

Tradefair won the award for Contribution in a Technology Support Role. For three decades, it has managed broadcast shows globally in partnership with the Department for International Trade and TechUK.

"We have clearly demonstrated we are engaging an audience well beyond our traditional broadcast manufacturing roots," said Thames Valley Chair Tony Orme.

The awards were presented at the centre's winter ball in Reading.

Matthew Bell

RTS London Leading animators drew an optimistic picture of their industry at an RTS London event in late November.

“Apply and pitch for stuff, even if you feel out of your depth,” said 2D animator and film-maker Elmaz Ekrem. “Someone will eventually take a chance on you.” Her film (made with Dominika Ożyńska) about the refugee crisis in Europe, *The Law of the Sea*, was part of Channel 4’s short-film strand *Random Acts*.

The panel offered advice to the many young animators in the audience. “Instagram is probably the single most important tool for an animator looking for work,” said Neil Kidney, who co-founded London animation studio Seed 16 years ago.

In contrast to “polished” showreels, Instagram posts didn’t “necessarily look good, but they give an insight into how [animators] are thinking and how they approach work. It’s like a second reel but it’s a more truthful reel about their inner animator.”

Kidney urged animators to build a broad set of skills: “[Doing] a little bit of everything [gives] a good foundation, across the board, for every step of the process.”

London tips for toon talent



The Law of the Sea

UCA/Channel 4

“Comic timing” was also useful, he added. “We have to get in people who [can] really hit the beat of a gag perfectly... I think people either have it or they don’t – it’s an extra skill [on top of] being a good animator.”

Christine MacKay, who

runs Eton- and Dundee-based business-to-business animator Salamandra.uk, agreed on the need for across-the-board knowledge: “Most of our animators... can do different types of animation.”

“Whenever I’m recruiting [a graduate], the first thing I

look for is body mechanics in a showreel: whether you can move a character correctly, get them to settle, get them to look natural and organic,” said animation director Will Cook, who has been working on *The Adventures of Paddington*, Blue Zoo’s new pre-school series for Nick Jr.

Cook, who has worked for Blue Zoo for the best part of a decade, is part of the Access: VFX initiative, which promotes diversity in animation.

The key to a good career in animation, agreed the panel, was to develop. “If you keep learning, you never get bored. Because you’re always learning new things, it sparks your imagination and creativity,” said MacKay.

“I learn through doing... letting the magic happen and not being scared of software,” said Ekrem. “When I was a student, I had a fear of failure, which prevented me from even trying to start.”

The young animator, who now classes herself as an “anti-perfectionist”, added: “Knowing my work will never be perfect has allowed me to let go and learn better.”

“How to get ahead in animation” was chaired and produced by Terry Marsh.

Matthew Bell

Smart film-making on the move

■ ‘Storytelling for everybody is here in your pocket,’ said Deirdre Mulcahy. The producer and trainer was demonstrating the smartphone’s filming capability at an RTS London event in November. ‘No matter how big the tool, it comes down to the person who is actually using [it],’ she said. ‘Storytelling is about where the focus is – and understanding how you shoot.’

Mulcahy, who became a video trainer after working for years as a camerawoman

for BBC News in many of the world’s hotspots, underlined the importance of the basic craft skills of framing, focus, exposure and sound: ‘Once you’ve cracked that, it starts making the material shot on your mobile phone far more professional looking.’

But she warned: ‘You need to know what platform you’re making your content for – if I shoot in landscape and we put that up on a vertical interface, I have lost two-thirds of [the shot].’

To demonstrate how smartphones can be used professionally, Mulcahy showed a clip from Steven Soderbergh’s psychological thriller *Unsane*, starring *The Crown*’s Claire Foy.

Unsane was shot on a mobile phone, using the Filmic Pro app. ‘There’s no zoomed-in shots in the whole film,’ said Mulcahy. ‘[A smartphone is] a great storytelling device as long as I’m shooting wides.’ She said the flaw with smartphones was their inability to match the

zoom functions of professional cameras, requiring operators to move closer to the action.

Mulcahy compared the practicality of shooting on a smartphone with using a professional camera: ‘Technically, the [Sony] FS5 is better, but, for practical purposes, I don’t carry the FS5 in my pocket, and it takes rigging and time.’

‘I’d be very happy to shoot and mix and match. I think the future is a mixed economy – because the cameras are getting so good on the mobile.’

‘Production in your pocket’ was produced by David Thomas.

James Cordell

Legendary film producer Robert Watts visited Norwich in November for a special screening of BBC Four's *The Galaxy Britain Built*, followed by a Q&A session. Watts's credits include the original *Star Wars* trilogy, the *Indiana Jones* films and *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*.

Watts was one of the contributors to presenter/producer and *Star Wars* superfan David Whiteley's affectionate look at the British talent behind *Star Wars*.

An audience of 75-plus, including two stormtroopers, enjoyed a screening of *The Galaxy Britain Built*, which won two prizes at last year's RTS East Awards (for Factual Programme and Post-Production).

They learned how the 1977 film, which nobody expected would make much of a splash, came to be filmed at Elstree Studios. The documentary covers the pre-production and filming of the movie, and speaks to director Gareth Edwards about how he used the same style and locations for spin-off *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*.

Sporting a Yoda badge on his lapel, Watts reminisced with Whiteley about his career as a production manager and producer on some of the biggest films of the 20th century.

Watts fielded questions

20th Century Fox



Norwich feels Star Wars force

from film students on how to get on in the industry. His advice to aspiring film-makers? Whatever you do, do it with passion.

■ Earlier that month, 50 students took part in the centre's "Breaking into broadcasting" event at Norwich University of the Arts. Run by the BBC Academy, the event aimed to give students an insight into working in the industry.

The morning session on mobile journalism, taken by Marc Settle, gave them the skills to go out into the city and shoot and edit a film entirely on their phones.

The afternoon sessions covered radio production with Fran Acheson and Jim Davis of BBC Radio London and Magic FM, and how to boost your CV and get on a recruitment shortlist.

Tony Campbell

RTÉ doc follows artists' fortunes

Acclaimed RTÉ One documentary *Exhibitionists: Road to the RHA* was screened by the RTS at a late-November event in Dublin. In the one-hour film, director Hilary Fennell followed seven artists attempting to have work accepted for Ireland's most important open-call art show, the Royal Hibernian Academy Summer Exhibition.

It was the first time that cameras had been allowed access to the judging process at the 196-year-old Royal Hibernian Academy. The film was broadcast on RTÉ One in June 2019.

At "Behind the scenes of an arts documentary", which was held at RTÉ Television Centre, Fennell and director of photography Steve O'Reilly discussed how they

developed, financed and filmed the documentary.

Fennell looked for artists with interesting stories to tell. Her subjects include a 92-year-old woman who believes printmaking keeps her young, a sculptor who makes art from recycled bicycle tyres and a former cannabis dealer who learnt to paint in prison.

Charles Byrne

RTS news IN BRIEF

All change in the regions

Rick Horne is the new Chair of RTS Devon and Cornwall. The Plymouth-based head of technical facilities at factual and entertainment indie Twofour has replaced Dan Adamson. Chris Bailey, a senior lecturer in film and digital media production at Plymouth College of Art, is now Deputy Chair. In Northern Ireland, Stellify Media director of operations Vikkie Taggart has moved into the chair vacated by Kieran Doherty.

East hosts event for film-makers

RTS East's networking evening in the Ruskin Gallery at Cambridge's Anglia Ruskin University attracted cinematographers, sound designers, directors, journalists, actors and writers, as well as new talent. The November event was held against the backdrop of an exhibition – 'Storytelling in the Fourth Industrial Revolution' – which offered a useful means of exploring traditional and new forms of storytelling across existing and new platforms.

Editors triumph at Bristol quiz

A team of freelance editors – Rudolph the Red Nose Render – held off 11 other teams, including Keo Films, Plimsoll Productions, Drummer TV, The Farm and Off the Fence, to win the RTS West of England Christmas quiz in early December. TV and radio presenter Steve le Fevre, who won the On-Screen Talent prize at the RTS West of England Awards 2018, hosted the quiz at the Folk House in Bristol.

RTS
Scotland

Leading animators struck an optimistic note at a Scotland Centre event for young animators trying to break into the industry.

"There are skill shortages across the board," said Sueann Rochester, MD of Red Kite Animation and the Scottish representative of Animated Women UK, which organised the event with the RTS at Edinburgh College of Art in November.

Speakers from leading Scottish animation houses offered advice to the many students in the audience. Rhona Drummond, who owns Edinburgh production studio Eyeballs, said: "For us [as a smaller studio], what matters is meeting the person."

Jill Wallace, head of HR and facilities at Axis Studios, which has bases in Glasgow, Bristol and London, said: "The CV is not what's going to get you hired but it may be



Marvo the Wonder Chicken, made by Red Kite Animation

Beano

Animators paint a bright future

the thing that doesn't get you hired... You can work your personality in.

"It's important that we get enough granular detail to get to know your work."

Annie Campbell, the owner of Glasgow-based Campbell Medical Illustration, said: "It's the small details that matter." Working at a medical animation studio, she added, there were only so many animated femurs she could see before repetition began to take hold.

Jim Jagger, director of animation at Rockstar Games, which has studios around the world, stressed the importance of producing a professional show reel. "[From] the font, the colour scheme, the composition, I can tell if [he or she] is going to be a good animator," he said.

Discussing the RTS/Animated Women UK event, Jagger said: "It was a great event because all of the speakers came from different backgrounds.

"It's good to engage with the students... and help people get jobs."

Corrie Young

Dunbar to host awards

■ RTS Scotland launched its 2020 Awards at the Glasgow Art Club in late November, announcing Karen Dunbar as host. The comedian and actor described her career as an 'unscripted journey', promising the awards would feature similar spontaneity.

A number of 2019 award winners appeared at the event, including talent from STV Productions, Hello Halo and Sorbier Productions.

Sorbier founder Patsi Mackenzie, who produced

Children's winner *Buid-heagain*, said she appreciated the recognition the RTS Awards gave to people working in the TV industry: "What I loved about it was that it felt very much for the practitioners. The red carpet stuff is great, and we all love that, but this felt it was for the people at the coalface."

The 2019 awards received a record 232 entries for the 24 categories and, with the arrival of the new BBC Scotland channel and Channel 4's Glasgow Hub, a high number of submissions are anticipated for next year's awards.

The online awards portal is open until 31 January 2020 and the awards ceremony will be held on 3 June at the Old Fruitmarket in Glasgow.

Donald Matheson

Dublin dips into archives

Republic
of Ireland

TV archives came under the microscope at RTÉ in Dublin.

Film-maker Sé Merry Doyle recently donated much of his work – the Loopline Collection – to the Irish Film Institute (IFI). Volume 1 of the collection includes Doyle's 1999 film about the lives of Dublin street traders, *Alive Alive O: A Requiem for Dublin*. The director discussed his decision to donate his archive to the IFI.

RTÉ series *The Irish Revolution*, produced by Martha Moloney, makes extensive use of archive material. She said that archive is an important part of programme-making, but warned that it



The Irish Revolution

IFI/RTÉ

can be expensive to use. Máire Aoibhinn Ní Ógáin, who looks after TG4's rapidly growing archive, completed the panel at the event, "Raiders of the (lost) archives".

Agnes Cogan and Charles Byrne

RTS EVENTS

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

National events

RTS FUTURES

Wednesday 12 February 2020

RTS Futures Television

Careers Fair 2020

Tickets: £10. 10:00am-4:00pm

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

RTS AWARDS

Wednesday 26 February 2020

**RTS Television Journalism
Awards 2020**

Sponsor: Avid

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

RTS AWARDS

Tuesday 17 March 2020

RTS Programme Awards 2020

In partnership with Audio
Network

Venue: Grosvenor House Hotel,
London W1K 7TN

Local events

DEVON AND CORNWALL

■ Jane Hudson

■ RTSDevonandCornwall@rts.org.uk

EAST

Wednesday 4 March

RTS East Awards 2020

Venue: The Assembly House,
Theatre Street, Norwich NR2 1RQ

■ Jayne Greene 07792 776585

■ RTSEast@rts.org.uk

ISLE OF MAN

■ Michael Wilson

■ michael.wilson@isleofmedia.org

LONDON

Wednesday 22 January

Are the Kids Alright?

6:30pm for 7:00pm

Venue: Hogg Lecture Theatre,
University of Westminster,
35 Marylebone Road, London
NW1 5LS

Wednesday 5 February

The Future of TV

6:30pm for 7:00pm

Venue: Deloitte, 2 New Street
Square, London EC4A 3BZ

■ Phil Barnes

■ rts@philipbarnes.com

MIDLANDS

■ Jayne Greene 07792 776585

■ RTSMidlands@rts.org.uk

NORTH EAST AND THE BORDER

Saturday 29 February

**RTS North East and the Border
2020 Awards**

7:00pm

Venue: Hilton Hotel, Bottle Bank,
Gateshead NE8 2AR

■ Joanna Makepeace

■ joanna.makepeace@sunderland.ac.uk

NORTH WEST

Monday 27 January

Masterclass with Frank Spotnitz

With the writer and co-creator
of *The X-Files*, *Medici: Masters
of Florence*, *The Man in the High
Castle* and *Ransom*. 6:30pm

Venue: Digital Performance Lab,
University of Salford, MediaCityUK,
Salford Quays M50 2HE

■ Rachel Pinkney 07966 230639

■ RPinkney@rts.org.uk

NORTHERN IRELAND

■ John Mitchell

■ mitch.mvbroadcast@btinternet.com

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

■ Charles Byrne (353) 87251 3092

■ byrnedc@iol.ie

SCOTLAND

Thursday 23 January

AGM and Burns celebration

AGM 5:30pm; Burns celebration

6:30pm. More details soon

Venue: Glasgow Art Club, 185
Bath Street, Glasgow G2 4HU

Wednesday 5 February

RTS Scotland Student

Television Awards 2020

Supported by STV, which will
film the ceremony and show
highlights on its digital platform,
along with the winning and
nominated films. Hosted by STV
presenter Laura Boyd. Recep-
tion 6:00pm, ceremony 7:00pm
Venue: Everyman Cinema,
Princes Square, Buchanan Street,
Glasgow G1 3JN

Thursday 20 February

**The Network Speaks – with
the Creative Diversity Network**

RTS Scotland is hosting an hon-
est and practical conversation
about how we can invest in the
best talent from a diverse pool.
This will be a safe, facilitated
space for people to ask any
questions they may be nervous
about. Topics include:

■ How you can spread the net
wide during recruitment

■ Dos and don'ts on set

■ What is talent?

■ Language and terminology

■ Culture and behaviour

Venue: TBC

Thursday 5 March

Inspirational women

Panel discussion to mark
International Women's Day on
8 March. Jointly organised by
RTS and Hello Halo TV.

Venue: Glasgow, TBC

Wednesday 6 May

**RTS Scotland Television Awards
2020 Nominees Party**

6:00pm

Venue: Glasgow Art Club,
185 Bath Street, Glasgow G2 4HU

Wednesday 3 June 2020

**RTS Scotland Television
Awards 2020**

Presented by Karen Dunbar.

Drinks reception 5:45pm;

awards ceremony 7:00pm

Venue: The Old Fruitmarket,
87-101 Albion Street, Glasgow
G1 1NQ

■ Cheryl Strong

■ RTSScotland@rts.org.uk

SOUTHERN

Thursday 16 January

Freelancers' Fair

Venue: TBC

Wednesday 5 February

Meet the Professionals

Join some 200 production-
based students from southern
universities to meet media
professionals for panel discus-
sions and networking. The event
is now in its 11th year.

Venue: Bournemouth University,
Talbot Campus, Fern Barrow,
Poole BH12 5BB

Friday 6 March

**RTS Southern Professional and
Student Television Awards**

7:00pm

Venue: Guildhall Winchester, The
Broadway, Winchester SO23 9GH

Thursday 12 March

In conversation with Dan Snow

Venue: TBC

Thursday 26 March

Working in Journalism

Venue: TBC

■ Stephanie Farmer

■ SFarmer@bournemouth.ac.uk

THAMES VALLEY

■ Tony Orme

■ RTSThamesValley@rts.org.uk

WALES

Wednesday 15 January

Screening and Q&A: Sex

Education series 2

6:00pm

Venue: Chapter Arts Centre,
Market Road, Cardiff CF5 1QE

■ 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

OFF MESSAGE

All eyes are on ITV as it prepares to launch what it hopes will be a ratings juggernaut, *The Masked Singer*. The reality singing show is based on a South Korean format, *King of Masked Singer*, and goes one step further than *The Voice* in hiding the identity of those who're flexing their vocal chords.

The contestants appear in elaborate disguises inspired by Japanese manga, mythical creatures and superheroes.

Critics have described the show as “bonkers” and “hallucinatory”, but it's proved a global smash, especially in the uber-competitive US, and in Australia, too.

New prime-time, shiny-floor hits are few and far between – so Off Message is very excited about this newcomer hitting our screens.

■ Few could deny that 2019 was a good year for Sky. The announcement of the company's plans to build a Hollywood-style film studio at Elstree in north London, creating more than 2,000 jobs, capped a memorable 12 months for Jeremy Darroch and his team.

Coincidentally, the news of Sky's Elstree project came just days after Sky Studios enjoyed an unprecedented night of success at the RTS Craft & Design Awards.

The Sky Atlantic-HBO drama

Chernobyl grabbed six trophies, while the addressable advertising platform Sky AdSmart received a special award in recognition of how it had “fundamentally changed TV advertising for good”.

Congratulations to Sky Studios' boss, Gary Davey, and to *Chernobyl*'s producer, Sister Pictures, run by the brilliant Jane Featherstone.

Davey had a busy evening congratulating his colleagues at the awards, but Featherstone, alas, was unable to attend. She was busy elsewhere, overseeing production on *The Power*, a 10-part series based on Naomi Alderman's sci-fi novel, commissioned by Amazon.

Off Message hopes to see her at some of the TV awards ceremonies to be held in the weeks that lie ahead. The betting is that *Chernobyl*'s success at the RTS Craft & Design Awards is a foretaste of further prizes to come.

■ Staying with the very best in scripted shows, the scale of Netflix's ambition and dedication to film-making of the highest quality continues to amaze.

Not only is there series 2 of *Sex Education* to look forward to, the remarkable *Marriage Story* – nominated for six Golden Globes – is regarded as a potential Oscar winner. Adam Driver is outstanding as Manhattan playwright Charlie Barber, juggling work and divorce. Noah Baumbach's script is compassionate, emotionally

searing and often hilarious. If you haven't yet seen it, you have a treat in store.

■ Oh, to be part of the club of the senior “Janes” in the UK TV industry.

Not only is there the previously mentioned drama doyenne making waves with *Chernobyl*, Jane Featherstone, but also Jane Millichip, in her senior leadership role at Sky Studios; Jane Tranter, riding high with *His Dark Materials* and *Succession*; and All3Media CEO Jane Turton, recently appointed Chair of the RTS.

■ Finally, Off Message bids a fond farewell to Channel 4's head of corporate relations, the well-connected Sophie Jones, who has announced that she's stepping down after 12 years at the broadcaster.

Sophie, whose presence brightened up many an RTS event, will take a short break before pursuing new opportunities.

During her time at Horseferry Road, she worked closely on Channel 4's nations and regions strategy, its approach to inclusion and diversity, and helped secure its latest public service licence.

CEO Alex Mahon echoed industry sentiments in her statement about Sophie. She said: “I'm immensely grateful for the support she's given me over the past two years, and we wish her all the best with whatever challenge she decides to take on next.”



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