

September 2024

Television

Turbocharging TV talent

The RTS launches its Mini MBA
in television and streaming media



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From the CEO



Our cover story is devoted to the launch this month of an exciting educational initiative – the RTS Mini MBA, focused on the business of television and streaming media. Inside, I explain what the course offers and how it can turbocharge the careers of those who work in television or are involved in the screen sector via such areas as accountancy, consulting, government, the law, regulation and tech. I'm proud that the RTS is providing

this incredible opportunity to thousands of people who want to learn more about our world-class industry.

Television is full of good reads this month. Don't miss Manori Ravindran's thoughtful profile of our new Culture Secretary, Lisa Nandy.

I hope you've all enjoyed Channel 4's exemplary Paralympics coverage: Katy Boulton's feature looks at the history of the Paras on TV and its power to promote positive role models for the disabled community.

Do read Matthew Bell's piece on the duo behind *RuPaul's Drag Race* and

their global success with their World of Wonder production company.

We also speak to Netflix's European production head, Anna Mallett, Chair of this month's RTS London Convention. If you haven't already booked your place at the conference, please do so soon. I can promise you a stellar line-up and an agenda-setting event. Hope to see you there.

Theresa Wise

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TV diary

We are at a time of conflicting energy at my company, Schnoobert

Productions. On the one hand, we are preparing for the transmission of *Apocalypse Slough*, the next instalment in the *Murder, They Hope* franchise for UKTV Gold, and the 11th I've written. That's exciting. But on the other hand, we're looking to our new projects and firing them out to broadcasters, hoping for the television-shaped fish to proverbially bite. So there's the confidence of a show that's actually been made ... and the nervous attentiveness to the seedlings that we hope will blossom into actual commissions.

■ **There's no typical day at Schnoobert. I'm the CEO, and I also write a lot of our slate, as well as working with as many newer writers as our thunderously full diary can manage. But one constant, which is why I always drive in with a smile on my face, is talking about story. For me, that makes the greatest days possible. Character arcs, potential plot points, even a story that might not go anywhere but gets you a single beautiful joke are all part of the joy. And seeing the narrative click into place is often the most satisfying moment of all.**

■ This week, for example, we're interviewing runners and writing assistants for a big project we've got script commissions for. Then we're meeting with some top-tier talent



Jason Cook returns to his old stomping ground at the Edinburgh Fringe before the Proustian rush of a hometown curry back in Newcastle

about a potential feature I've thought up. We're also pitching a new factual show, which is very exciting. And that's all before a quick trip to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe to see some new talent and hopefully get them to start writing scripts.

■ **I made my career at the Fringe. I started out as a stand-up and performed a new show every year for about 10 years. It's such a creatively free space compared with the comedy circuit, where often you're playing to stags and hens. My stand-up act was (and is – I still dabble) based on stories about my life and family, and those stories I told in Edinburgh would eventually become my first sitcom, *Hebburn*, for the BBC. So the Fringe has a very special place in my heart.**

■ **And the Fringe isn't far from me. We are based in Newcastle, where I was born, at the heart of the newly emerging television sector in the North East. There's been incredible investment up here in the TV world, led by North East Screen (our funding and development agency). They are great and really help us get by, as well as promoting the cause of productions being shot up here.**

It's an incredible place to make a show, I call it "10-minute town" because you're 10 minutes from everywhere. Want a castle? We've got loads of them! And 10 minutes from that castle will be a beach or a quaint Northumbrian village, which will be 10 minutes from a concrete prefab housing area, which will be 10 minutes from rolling countryside. With budgets tight and unit moves wasting precious time, why not shoot the show up here?

■ **As the day finishes, we often end up at what is the main reason I rented my office here: the Indian restaurant Dabbawal is just round the corner. I was in the merchant navy when I was younger, and we would visit India and have this incredible food. I couldn't find it anywhere in the UK ... until I walked into this restaurant, had one mouthful and was transported back in time – much like the food critic in the film *Ratatouille* – to a moment where I would be sitting in my boiler suit at sunset, eating that incredible cuisine from a banana leaf. A joyous end to a joyous week.**

Jason Cook is a stand-up, screenwriter and CEO of Schnoobert Productions.

COMFORT CLASSIC



Rising Damp

Ruth, Rigsby and Philip share the *Rising Damp* sofa

On paper, it shouldn't work. The show is set in a seedy boarding house run by a bigoted, sexually frustrated, resentful man who looks like he rarely washes or changes clothes. His wife has left him, and he is a fantasist who makes up stories of heroic wartime deeds. He treats his boarders with contempt, apart from the one he's hopelessly in love with – college administrator Ruth, played by Frances de la Tour, later known to millions from the *Harry Potter* films.

Welcome to Rigsby, the central character of *Rising Damp*, a contender for ITV's greatest sitcom ever. It succeeds largely because of Leonard Rossiter's brilliant portrayal of Rigsby. By all

Steve Clarke finds comic verve in a 1970s sitcom that now comes with a 'health warning'

accounts, Rossiter was a perfectionist, but he makes it all look so easy, delivering his lines "with masterful pace and timing, speaking volumes with a simple twitch or roll of his eyes". This is the perceptive verdict of Mark Lewisohn, author of the *Radio Times Guide to TV Comedy*.

Rossiter's comic performance is up in the sitcom stratosphere with John Cleese as Basil Fawlty and Rowan Atkinson as Edmund Blackadder. To

think that, at the time Rossiter was recording *Rising Damp* at Yorkshire Television's Leeds studios, he was also starring in the BBC's equally brilliant *The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin*.

Since making its debut in September 1974, *Rising Damp* has rarely been off air. Today, Rigsby would be called a racist. Since 2020, the show has been shown with a "health warning" that it contains racist language. Yet, paradoxically, *Rising Damp* was ahead of its time. One of its leading characters was a black man, bookish student Philip Smith, played by Don Warrington, who decades later would star in BBC One's *Death in Paradise*. And while Rigsby is a boor, throughout Philip is portrayed as the most intelligent and socially sophisticated of all the characters, even

though he, too, is something of a fantasist. We never discover if he really is the son of a tribal chief.

This is what Warrington had to say about *Rising Damp* when interviewed by *The Daily Telegraph* in 2022: “A lot of black people still say to me that their parents would call them down from their bedrooms whenever it was on, because of the way it showed a black man on TV who was not being put down or abused.”

The fourth main character was naïve medical student Alan Moore (Richard Beckinsale), a long-haired, long-suffering tenant of Rigsby. At its best, Rigsby and Alan’s banter is exquisite and not without affection. There is something of the father-son relationship in their bickering. Tragically, two years after he left *Rising Damp* in 1977, Beckinsale died of a heart attack, aged 31. Rossiter died five years later in 1984 after a heart attack backstage at a London theatre. He was 57.

The show was created by Eric Chappell, an Electricity Board accountant turned playwright, and was based on his 1973 stage play *The Banana Box*. His best scripts for *Rising Damp* crackled with comic verve, much of the humour mined from the English obsession with class, status and thwarted sex. They are shot through with unresolved sexual tension: in the first episode, Ruth literally throws herself at an unresponsive Philip, and Rigsby’s unrequited love for Ruth endures through all four series.

Chappell defended Rigsby, saying he “was not a racist or a bigot, but he was prejudiced and suspicious of strangers”. He is certainly a post-war English archetype: a curmudgeon with elements of Tony Hancock and *Dad’s Army*’s Captain Mainwaring. Yes, he carries a chip on his shoulder, but we sympathise with him when his back is to the wall, as it frequently is.

That *Rising Damp* was made by Leeds-based ITV company Yorkshire Television says a lot about the creativity and risk-taking of the old regional ITV in which companies such as Yorkshire and Granada regularly outgunned their London-based peers. ■

Rising Damp is on ITVX.

Ear candy

Never Strays Far

All sports have their own languages, but few are as arcane as that of cycling. It’s a hotchpotch of English, French, Italian and Dutch expressions that will confound the unsuspecting channel surfer who stumbles upon one of the three major professional Grand Tours.

Fortunately, Tour de France coverage on ITV4 has broadcaster-turned-cycling-scholar Ned Boulting and four-time Tour de France stage winner David Millar spelling out the intricate action in layman’s terms.

Tune into their commentary long enough and the race (and all those races within the race) – once obscured by the vivid blur of the peloton – will come into sharp focus. I’m guessing you already know what *peloton* means thanks to those smug exercise bike adverts, but you’ll soon learn your *GC contenders* from your *domestiques*, and your *breakaways* from your *grupettos*.

You’ll probably need the primer for their podcast, *Never Strays Far*, hosted by Boulting and Millar alongside another former pro, Pete Kennaugh, who used to ride for Team Sky. While they’re covering a stage race like the Tour, they publish a daily post-race debrief. Although casual, this tends to assume some knowledge.

But once you’re in the know, it’s a fun listen, full of hipster takes and wild digressions concerning life on Le Tour. One second, they’ll be questioning whether the King of the Mountains jersey (the spotty one won by the best

mountain climber) is redundant in “the era of the Pog” (Pog being Tadej Pogačar, a rider so dominant he can beat pure climbers at their own game while still winning the overall race). The next, they’ll be unpacking the strange lunches dished out to the press: apparently, the Tour organisers “roll out the whelks” once a week.

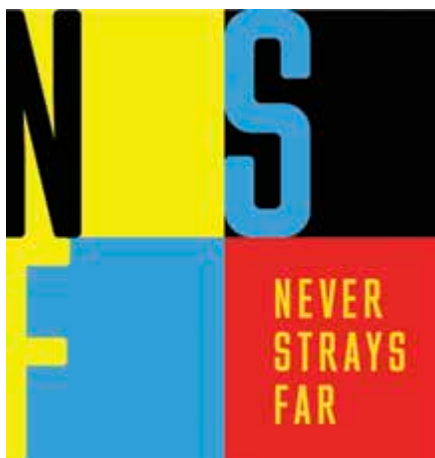
The idea is that conversation “never strays far” from bike racing. Digressions are built into the title just as the sport “fits within the real world”, said Boulting on announcing their mission statement for the podcast in 2019. Perhaps this is more so than any other sport, added Millar, given that it isn’t “confined to

stadia”, and thus sparks conversation about the wider histories and cultures of the many places it visits.

In fact, pro cycling resists easy delimitation in almost every aspect. For stage 18, Boulting took listeners behind the scenes of ITV’s live coverage with an audio tour of their OB truck. One of the most difficult jobs, we hear, is choosing when to cut to an ad break. The racing is so unpredictable there’s often no “right moment” to cut.

I can imagine a lot of non-cycling fans baulking at listening to yet more commentary after a five-hour stage. But it’s this very length and flux which means that, no matter how extensive the camera coverage or perceptive the real-time commentary (and Boulting and Millar are very perceptive), the big picture only reveals itself in retrospect. Or in a podcast like *Never Strays Far*. ■

Harrison Bennett



WORKING LIVES



Access coordinator

Far left: Julie Fernandez as Brenda in *The Office*

Julie Fernandez made her mark in the groundbreaking BBC comedy *The Office*, playing Brenda, memorably left stranded on a staircase during a fire drill by Ricky Gervais's ghastly office manager, David Brent. She's now moved behind the camera, helping disabled people to be creative on set.

What does the job involve?

Supporting everyone on a production – cast, crew and creative team members – who is deaf, disabled and/or neurodivergent. I assess access requirements and put measures in place so that disabled people can turn up to work and, from day one, be creatively brilliant without worrying, for example, how they're going to get to the toilet on location if they're a wheelchair user. I also support productions in putting adjustments in place and diversifying their team.

Why is your job necessary?

Practical and affordable measures, such as providing access ramps, nominating quiet rooms or employing a British sign language interpreter, allow

disabled people to be creative. It's important we have access to employment and that our stories are heard.

Why did you retrain for this?

Having had a 30-year career as an actor, I understand how hard it can be to give your best to a production in a particular role, only to be also looked at as a representative of disability for the whole production, even though you're not being paid for that. I now get to assist disabled creatives in a way that nobody did for me. I can't believe this is what I get to do for my job!

You have other strings to your bow...

Yes, Sara Johnson and I run the Access Team at Casarotto Ramsay & Associates, where we represent and supervise 13 access coordinators working across TV, film, theatre, events and entertainment. We also advise broadcasters, streamers and production companies, explaining how to take an "access first" approach to their work. It was Sara and I who ran the very first access coordinator training for ScreenSkills. I'm very proud of that.

What was the first production you worked on as a coordinator?

A 2022 Dave comedy, *Perfect*, which had lots of disabled roles. It was written by disabled comedian and writer Laurence Clark, who was in the same class as me at Treloar – a boarding school for disabled kids in Hampshire.

You have had a long acting career – how does that help your new job?

It's incredibly helpful – it enables me to fully understand what is required of an access coordinator. When I starred in the Spanish-set BBC soap *Eldorado*, it would have been of enormous help if I'd had an access coordinator supporting me. *The Office* was different: Ash Atalla, the producer, and I also went to school together at Treloar. I came in on the second series, and everyone had worked with Ash on the first, so the whole crew and cast had overcome their worries about working with a wheelchair user.

When is a coordinator first called in?

It's helpful to start as soon as a programme is given the green light. For

example, we can support the script team when there's a disabled person or storyline in the show – we wouldn't tell them how to write it but we might suggest a tone and a language that is right for a particular era. We help the heads of department if they want to tap into the talents of disabled creatives, and can advise on the accessibility of locations, hotels and travel. If there's a disabled cast member, having an access coordinator on set helps the shoot run more smoothly, especially during the first days. We also get involved in post-production, advising post houses, as well as giving an access point of view on publicity materials and press screening requirements.

How long do you work on a show?

It's not a full-time position – I've had 15 access coordinator jobs on the go at one time across different productions. You dip in and out as the production requires, but three to five days (worked as 10-hour days) is typical and practical. It doesn't add much to the costs of a production, considering the experience it brings.

What does a typical day look like?

It's so varied. A lot of the work can be done from home – phone calls, emails and Zoom meetings. I also go to table reads, shoots and screenings.

What do you bring to work with you?

My support worker. As a wheelchair user with brittle bones, I need an assistant to help me get out and about.

What is best and worst about the job?

The best is enabling other disabled people to concentrate on being creative. The worst is when productions don't engage properly and disability becomes a tick-box exercise.

Did you always want to work in TV?

I fell into it. I was doing my A-levels, but I wasn't particularly academic. I was in and out of hospital for so much of my childhood – I've had 60-70 operations, mainly when I was young. I'd applied to universities and polytechnics for a variety of degrees but couldn't physically get in anywhere because of a lack of wheelchair access. The BBC contacted my school when they were casting for the character of Nessa Lockhead in *Eldorado*. I auditioned and got the job. So a week

'We still have a way to go':
Julie Fernandez



David Proud

before my 18th birthday, I left school and went to Spain.

How important was your role in *The Office to the representation of disabled people on screen?*

Massive. It helped to galvanise a conversation about disability rights. The show was also a lot of fun to work on.

Do you still have acting ambitions?

I don't do as much as I used to but I'm happy to act if there's a good role. I've just turned 50 and I'm really enjoying being an access coordinator and working at Casarotto to help the industry as a whole to understand the value of disabled people.

Should access coordinators themselves be disabled?

Yes, because we speak the language, understand nuance and live that life.

What advice would you give to someone wanting to do the job?

Experience working in TV, film or the theatre because that enables you to understand how things are made and

who's who in productions. It's also important to have charm, resilience and a passion for helping bring sustainable change and full inclusion to the entertainment industry.

How much further does TV have to go?

It's a slow process but we are getting there. Screenwriter Jack Thorne's MacTaggart lecture in 2021, in which he said disability was the "forgotten diversity" in the industry, was a watershed moment for the disability community. It's because of Jack that the access coordinator role exists and that broadcasters are accepting responsibility for the change that needs to be made. It took a good five or so years for the industry to accept intimacy coordinators, but now every production is open to the value of that role. Over the next few years, it will be the same for access coordinators. There are many more disabled people in TV now and we are on an upward trajectory, but we still have a way to go. ■

Julie Fernandez was interviewed by Matthew Bell.

New Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy is facing an overflowing in-tray. **Manori Ravindran** profiles an ambitious woman who grew up in the orbit of the media

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport wasn't exactly what the Manchester-born Shadow International Development Minister Lisa Nandy had in mind in the months leading up to July's general election.

Nandy, 45, had counted on the international development brief — a natural extension of her work since September 2023. But there was a fly in the ointment: Shadow Culture Secretary Thangam Debbonaire, a cello-playing arts champion, lost her Bristol seat to the Green Party co-leader Carla Denyer, leaving the key role open.

"It wasn't a great shock that Debbonaire lost her seat because all the polls suggested that, but I don't think anyone had Nandy on the radar," says one industry insider.

Nandy's profile was highest as a Labour leadership candidate in 2020, coming third behind Rebecca Long-Bailey. Under Keir Starmer's leadership, she then served for 18 months as Shadow Foreign Secretary, but subsequent jobs have been less senior. "She did seem a tiny bit marginalised," says the source. "Now it's a good thing she's there."

Certainly, Debbonaire, with her musical pedigree and experience as a performer was a natural choice. But on 5 July, as part of Starmer's first Cabinet, it was Nandy who walked into No 10 for the first time in her 14-year political career, to be appointed Culture Secretary. One of her first major



What's next,
Minister?

engagements with the TV industry will be as a speaker at the RTS London Convention this month.

In an interview with the podcast *The Rest is Politics*, Nandy recalled what Starmer told her at No 10: “I know you love the development brief, but I’m asking you to move because I need you to make an impact, and we need a legacy in this.”

The PM’s reasoning is prudent. Nandy is the 12th Culture Secretary in the last 10 years; the past Labour government cycled through just five culture secretaries between 1997 and 2010. As for the Conservative government’s legacy in the UK’s arts sector, a new report in July by the Campaign for the Arts lobby group and the University of Warwick revealed that the culture budget has dropped by 6% since 2010, when the Tories came to power. Elsewhere in Europe, Germany, France and Finland have grown their culture spend by up to 70%.

On the broadcasting front, the BBC bore the brunt of Conservative ire, with Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries in 2022 promising to abolish the licence fee when the corporation’s Royal Charter came up for renewal in 2027. Dorries froze the fee for two years, until March 2024, with an agreement to have annual inflation-linked increases from then until 2028.

However, in December, the Government raised the licence fee by just £10.50 (6.6%), a below-inflation rise that led to a £90m funding gap. It was the worst possible news for the BBC and the wider production sector, already crippled by the impact of two Hollywood strikes and the commissioning slowdown from commercial broadcasters battling an advertising downturn.

It is indisputable that Nandy has her work cut out. But while her previous shadow roles (Levelling Up and Foreign Secretary prior to International Development) didn’t engage directly with the cultural sector, her family life and upbringing puts her far closer to the TV industry than many of her predecessors.

Nandy was born and raised in

Manchester. Her mother is ex-Granada TV journalist Luise Byers, the daughter of Liberal MP Frank Byers, and her father is Indian academic Dipak Nandy, a race-relations expert. The couple divorced when Nandy was seven and she was raised in a single-parent household by her mother. Byers went on to marry the late, great investigative RTS-award-winning journalist Ray Fitzwalter, who was editor of Granada’s influential *World in Action* programme for many years. He died in 2016.

“That did shape me a lot, especially with the attitude of the Tory government at the time towards single mums,” said Nandy on *The Rest is Politics*. “It leaves a very deep impression on you because you feel you’re under attack from your own government.”

She added that Byers “was the only woman in the current affairs department at Granada”.

Byers was head of news during the Hillsborough disaster, and Nandy recalls her mother making tough calls to

deliver seminal coverage of the stadium crowd crush that claimed 97 lives. “That footage was everything,” she said. “It was decisive in helping [the Hillsborough justice campaign] to achieve what they achieved.”

Nandy’s father, Dipak, was born in Calcutta and studied at Leeds University under Marxist literary professor Arnold Kettle. She says the Kettles — of whom Martin Kettle is an associate editor at *The Guardian* — are like a “second family”. Dipak, a self-proclaimed Marxist, was among the creators of the Race Relations Act.

If growing up in the orbit of media has impacted Nandy’s principles, the industry now hopes those values will translate into policy. There’s every indication they might. When Nandy challenged Starmer for the Labour leadership, she wrote, as part of a column for the website *LabourList*, that if

elected she would protect the licence fee and “not hold the BBC to ransom over appointments and funding”.

Four years later, the TV sector breathed a sigh of relief when in July Nandy told Radio 4’s *Today* programme: “I’m keen to ensure the BBC can continue to thrive into the future. I’ve traditionally been a big supporter of the licence fee, as has Keir Starmer.” The PM later confirmed this, noting that there will be “some more thought between now and [2027]” but that Labour is “committed to the BBC and we are committed to the licensing arrangements”.

Jane Featherstone, one of the UK’s leading drama producers and co-founder and Chief Creative Officer of *Chernobyl* and *Eric* producer Sister,

told *Television*: “I like the pronouncements [Nandy’s] made in the last weeks already. She’s supporting the BBC, supporting the right things ... and it’s critical that we root the DCMS in education, culture and

‘I’M KEEN TO ENSURE THAT THE BBC CAN CONTINUE TO THRIVE INTO THE FUTURE’

youth opportunity because that’s where the shoots grow from.”

Nandy, says Featherstone, “understands the opportunity we have in this country to excel even more in the creative industries. We’re really, really good at this stuff and we have to continue to invest in it.”

The specifics of Labour’s BBC backing remain hazy. Any suggestion that Nandy might be soft on the BBC was dismissed by her prompt response in August to the corporation’s handling of the Huw Edwards scandal.

On the licence fee, John McVay, head of the trade association Pact, warns that Labour’s ability to support the BBC may be hamstrung by other, more pressing economic priorities. Labour is unlikely to duplicate Conservative tactics such as freezing the licence fee, says McVay, but it’s doubtful the corporation will receive an above-inflation ▶

► increase, given that consumers are still feeling financially squeezed. “Right now, with the cost of living [crisis] and increasing child poverty, the idea that even Labour would say, ‘We’re going to give the BBC a massive above-inflation increase in the licence fee’ is going too far,” says McVay. “I just don’t see that happening.”

While questions continue about the appropriateness of the licence fee — it is, after all, a regressive tax that everyone has to pay at the same amount, regardless of their financial situation — former BBC executive Roger Mosey insists that it is “still the least worst way of doing it”.

“And that seems to be where Labour are,” he says.

Mosey, a former head of BBC Television News and the current Master of Selwyn College at Cambridge, is accustomed to hand-wringing over the corporation’s funding. “Every time [they say], ‘One last go of the licence fee, and then we’ll find a better way of funding.’ And it never quite works out.”

Many in the industry hope Nandy will also be supportive of the wider UK production sector. She begins her tenure during one of the most challenging periods the screen sector has faced in decades. A July survey by the union Bectu of more than 2,300 film and TV workers revealed that 52% weren’t working and 38% planned to leave the industry within five years.



The 1989 Hillsborough disaster: Nandy’s mother, Luise Byers, oversaw Granada TV coverage

Roderick Smith / Alamy Stock Photo

Derek Drennan, Managing Director of Nest Productions, is lobbying the DCMS to consider a new tax break for unscripted productions that would build on existing tax credits for high-end TV drama and children’s

Banjay UK boss and former BBC Two controller Patrick Holland has also called for an unscripted tax break), some say it is unwise to believe Nandy and the DCMS will have genie-like abilities to fix the creative sector overnight. “We’re not going to get any new tax credits,” says McVay. Chancellor Rachel Reeves is committed to the fiscal rules, he notes, “which means that if we hadn’t managed to get the film tax credit over the line in the spring budget, Labour wouldn’t have done it”.

McVay says Debonnaire admitted to him that she would have struggled to get it through under Labour. “The idea they’re going to start splashing cash on new tax credits is going to be a big ask right now, when they’ve got other big problems.”

In Manchester, on 31 July, Nandy convened a summit of 150 cultural organisations, including the BBC, Prime Video and Warner Bros. Discovery, to invite them to work with the DCMS to grow the economy. The UK creative industries alone are worth £125bn — more than life sciences, automotive manufacturing, aerospace and the oil and gas sectors combined. “I promise you that we will walk alongside you, we will have your back, and we will give voice to the country many of us have believed in all our lifetime but never quite yet seen,” said Nandy.

Still in the thick of her honeymoon period, the new Culture Secretary is saying all the right things and has all to play for. But as the creative sector addresses a range of challenges, the television industry may need to prepare itself for some tough answers. ■

‘I PROMISE THAT WE’LL WALK ALONGSIDE [THE INDUSTRY] AND WILL HAVE YOUR BACK’

programming, as well as the new 40% indie film credit. His campaign is quietly gaining traction. Once he reaches 1,000 signatures, he says he will write to Nandy.

As well-intentioned as Drennan’s proposal is (and it’s worth noting that



Nandy at Labour’s party conference in Liverpool

Creative Commons

Matthew Bell talks to the duo behind *RuPaul's Drag Race* as their company, World of Wonder, turns into a global sensation



Glitter, glam and glad rags

RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars

Courtesy of World of Wonder

RuPaul's *Drag Race* celebrates its 15th birthday in the US and 5th in the UK this year. World-wide, it is approaching 1,000 episodes. That's a lot of glitter, glam and glad rags.

As Baga Chipz memorably said on the UK version: "I'm like thrush – you

can't get rid of me." You could say the same about the wildly successful *Drag Race*, but did World of Wonder founders Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato think their show – which remains in, literally, rude health – would last so long and reach so far?

"No," admits Bailey, "but you wish the best for all your babies. It comes

down to the incredible artists. The talent has been around for generations, well before *Drag Race*, but that talent never really had a platform on TV, a showcase for its creativity.

"At the same time, drag is not just something for the margins. Even though it comes from the LGBTQ community, it's universally relatable. ▶



RuPaul holds court at DragCon UK

► Like Ru says, ‘You’re born naked and the rest is drag.’”

Bailey was born in Portsmouth and studied English at Oxford University, before joining the Graduate Film Program at New York University and meeting Barbato. The young Brit made an instant impression. “I thought Fenton was kind of a freak. He had on fluorescent, leopard-like, super-tight pants, high-top sneakers and a pearl necklace; his hair was in a bun and he had a dangling earring,” recalls Barbato, who hails from New Jersey.

Bailey was less struck: “Randy was all-American. He was wearing a pair of acid-washed jeans...”

“I never bought a pair of acid-washed jeans, Fenton...”

Bailey corrects himself: “They were *naturally* worn and faded, frayed; they were authentically old, and he had hair, as did I then. He was wearing a T-shirt his best friend had painted with a horrible portrait of Marcia Brady...”

“It was the Brady Bunch,” corrects Barbato. “I’m sorry,” continues Bailey, “I was, ‘What a mess!’ Everybody else was in preppy button-downs, penny loafers, and Randy was not *that* at all.”

Bailey and Barbato are talking to *Television* via Zoom from LA. They are great conversationalists; a double act honed over 40 years. For a while, they were an item but for two decades have been partners only in business. “Having someone you can trust, even to the level of arguing but knowing it’s

never going to break the trust bond, has been really helpful,” says Bailey.

TV wasn’t their first venture. “We thought pop music was our calling. We were called the Pop Tarts and then, I guess because people didn’t get the message, we called ourselves the Fabulous Pop Tarts,” recalls Bailey.

They were an electropop duo, which Bailey has described in the past as “like Pet Shop Boys but camper”. Is that fair? “Yes, which I think was our problem, because Pet Shop Boys are quite camp enough.”

While on tour in Atlanta, Bailey and Barbato met the then-unknown drag queen RuPaul Charles in a truly “life-changing moment”. The duo formed World of Wonder in 1991 and

Made in Brixton

Manhattan Cable, a gloriously trashy late-night show for Channel 4 that took its content from the crazy world of US public-access TV, was the company’s first production. The 1991 series featured a revolving cast of the talented and talentless seeking their 15 minutes of fame – Queerdonna, Filthy the Dog, even a young RuPaul – expertly hosted by the effortlessly hip Laurie Pike.

‘People seemed open to more fresh ideas in the UK than the US. Entry to the



Randy Barbato and Fenton Bailey

media in Hollywood was super-difficult 20 or 30 years ago. It’s different now,’ recalls Randy Barbato. Fenton Bailey adds: ‘Channel 4 was set up to accommodate voices that weren’t being heard.

It was a great time to be making stuff.’

From their Brixton base, the duo went on to make *The Adam and Joe Show*, the TV debut of Adam Buxton and Joe Cornish, and the Jon Ronson documentary series *The Secret Rulers of the World*.

Do they miss working in south London? ‘Not really,’ admits Bailey, though he regularly returns to the UK. ‘One strong memory is when there was a riot, and someone was burning down the station. We’d just bought one of the first non-linear edit systems. We’d end up sleeping in the office to guard it.’

went on to produce RuPaul's shows, drag conventions and, most lucratively, *RuPaul's Drag Race*, which has notched up 33 Emmy awards. The LA-based World of Wonder has made UK shows such as *The Adam and Joe Show*, and documentaries on subjects as varied as the 1969 Stonewall riots, Monica Lewinsky and Robert Mapplethorpe.

The real estate reality show *Owning Manhattan* is currently wowing (and appalling) audiences on Netflix, and *RuPaul's Drag Race Global All Stars* began streaming in the UK on global hub WOW Presents Plus last month.

It's a dizzyingly diverse slate, far removed from their favourite childhood shows. Barbato names variety series such as *The Carol Burnett Show* and *Cher*, while Bailey fondly remembers the Adam West/Burt Ward *Batman and Robin*: "It was camp, powerful and comical, silly and irreverent. There was something subversive about it.

"And then, of course, *Are You Being Served?*, which was camp and outrageous. Randy, are you familiar with Mrs Slocombe's pussy? Sometimes it's hard to believe that people got away with what they got away with."

Over three decades, World of Wonder has travelled from the fringes of popular culture to the TV mainstream, giving a voice to the outsider. *RuPaul's Drag Race* began life on a US gay pay-channel, gravitating to streamers such as Netflix and national broadcasters around the world.

WOW Presents Plus launched in 2017. The company predicts that 2024 will be a record year for growth. Since the start of the year, it claims that subscribers are up globally by 38%. Audience figures are especially strong in Brazil, France, South Africa, the Philippines and Mexico. The service costs around \$5 a month.

"This is not meant to be bragging, but financially we've been super-successful. We've had growth every year since we started – we've been super-scrappy," says Barbato.

"[But] we are not in competition with Netflix – there is room for a commercially successful streamer that satisfies an audience like ours."

Bailey adds: "In a world with a mountain of content, people will still

spend the price of a latte on something that is more specialist and curated.

"We are not trying to be all things to all people, and we are not ruled by an algorithm. It's curiosity, it's wonder. We think that if it's interesting to us, then it's going to be interesting to other people, too."

The TV business is more complicated nowadays but a lot more fun, reckons Bailey. Television, he says, used to be kept in its box. There was a "suspicion of the medium – it was likely to rot your brain and ruin your eyesight and was the focus of all the usual moral panics.

"It is incredibly exciting the way [it's developed]. I have kids – the nine-year-old is a YouTuber and the 17-year-old is making and creating his own content, way ahead of anything Randy and I were doing when we were at film school in our twenties.

"It's a fundamentally different world – we're living in a screen age."

No one has summed up the essential goodness of *RuPaul's Drag Race* better than the *Observer* journalist Eva Wiseman. She wrote that it has been responsible for "taking drag mainstream and for showing, week by week, that queer people are not odd or inferior, but funny and nuanced and

human, and worthy of respect".

RuPaul's Drag Race matters at a time when drag acts have come under sustained attack from the far right, both in Britain and in the US, where some states have banned drag

shows from public places.

"The rise of the populist and evangelical right is a tremendous problem in America and also for the rest of the world... there is no greater threat to our very existence than that," says Bailey.

Nevertheless he remains hopeful: "Paradoxically, whatever people do in terms of crushing dissent and silencing voices, they are doomed to fail. That's not just my optimistic nature. Historical record shows it. You can try to turn the clock back, but you might as well be screaming at the waves."

As for the future, Bailey promises: "There's no stopping. They're going to [have to] carry me out in a box, kicking and screaming." ■



Courtesy of France Télé

The worldwide wow factor

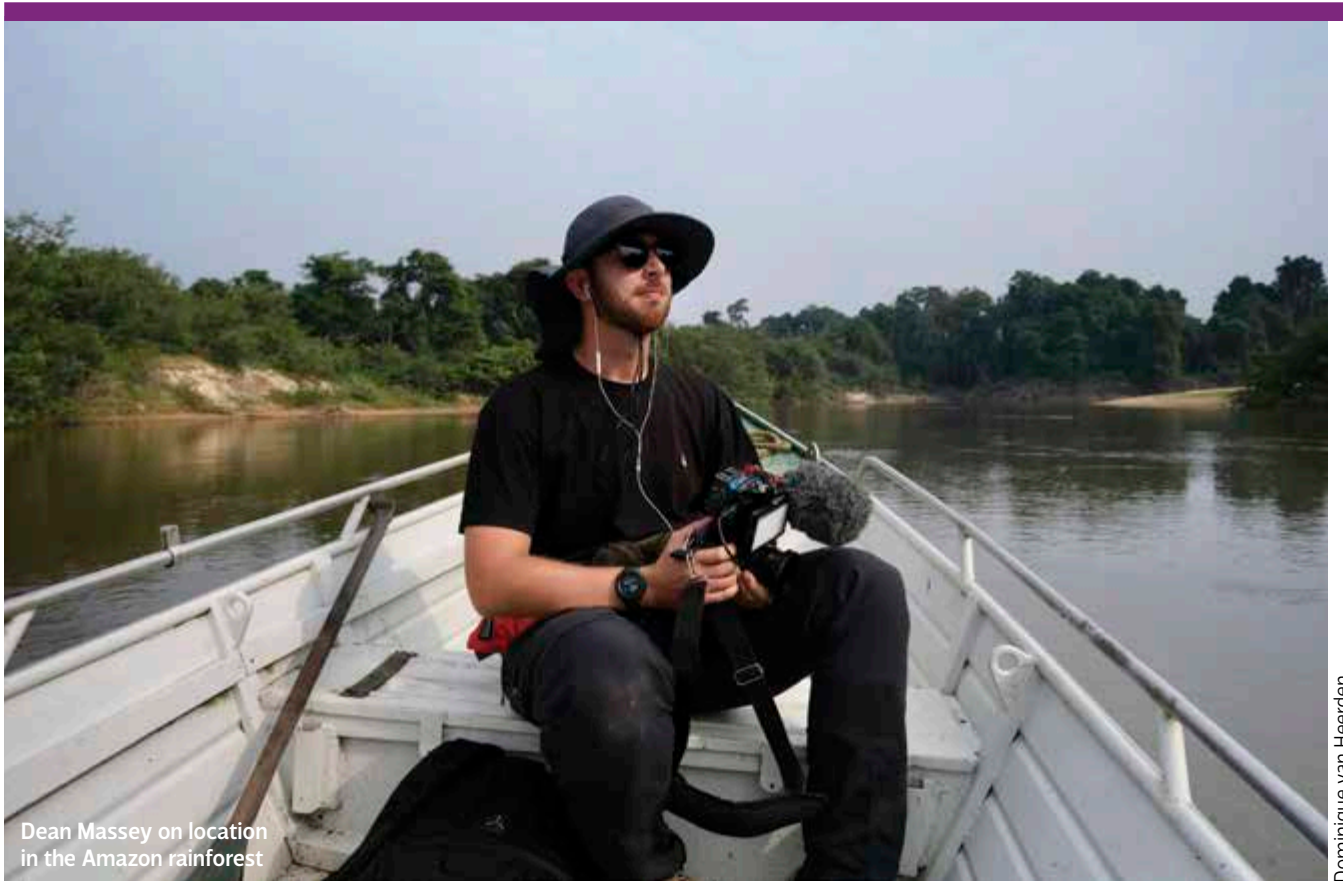
Twenty-six versions of the original US show have been produced across 17 countries, including the hit UK version, back on BBC Three for a sixth series this autumn.

The first four series alone of *RuPaul's Drag Race UK* have been streamed more than 67 million times on BBC iPlayer. Worldwide, says Fenton Bailey, the show has had similar success: "Drag has existed in every culture and it's emerging from the shadows. People are embracing it. On the TV executive side, there's apprehension – then they make the show and it's, "Oh my God, what happened? It's doing phenomenally well!"

Randy Barbato adds: "We take our time figuring out who our partners are going to be. The show itself needs to be immersed and reflect the culture of that country. Every season, in each territory, we rip the show apart and rebuild it – the show is like a drag queen and we dress it up and turn it out in its finest drag every season."

Bailey chips in: "A drag queen isn't going to wear the same thing on the runway twice. Spain brings to the table an Almodóvar vibe; France is haute couture.

"The shows are also determined by the personality of the hosts and judges," adds Bailey. "In France, we've got Nicky Doll, who was on *Drag Race* and is an incredible host. In Spain, it's the two Javiers [Ambrossi and Calvo]. The shows feel very authentic to their place. And, you know, there's nothing more British than Baga Chipz!"



Dean Massey on location in the Amazon rainforest

Dominique van Heerden

Meet the RTS bursary pioneers 10 years on

A little help when you're starting out can kickstart a career.
Harrison Bennett hears how three of our young scholars fared

It has been 10 years since the Society's Royal Patron – then HRH The Prince of Wales, now HM King Charles III – launched the RTS bursary scheme. To celebrate, we caught up with three of the very first cohort to hear some of our scholars' many success stories. Their career paths have led them in diverse directions, from reporting in war zones to spinning tunes on Radio 1, to making a mark in children's TV...

Dean Massey

On the night of 23 February 2022, Dean Massey wasn't at the Grosvenor House Hotel in London to pick up his Camera Operator of the Year award at the RTS Television Journalism Awards.

Massey was watching the ceremony from another hotel – in Kyiv, Ukraine – having been posted there by Sky News. For the former RTS Bursary Scholar, there was no time to process a remarkable full-circle moment

because 23 February was also the eve of the largest armed European conflict since the Second World War.

He still remembers being woken up early the next morning by his phone ringing incessantly, and rushing out on to the hotel balcony to witness the first blows of Russia's invasion.

Despite the wails of air-raid sirens, and the vibrations in his chest from the blasts of incoming missiles, Massey reached for his camera and captured one of the first artillery attacks on a

distant apartment block. His shot ended up on newspaper websites.

It was a far cry from his first film credit: a social media advert for his local paintballing arena, which he filmed on his GoPro Hero 1. It was worth it, he says, for the £50 voucher for another game. But it also planted a seed. The RTS bursary scheme helped fund a television and video production degree at Solent University, Southampton. Not only did it buy Massey an Apple iMac along with Adobe Premiere Pro software for his studies, it also meant that when the chance arose at Sky News of a year's work experience, he could make it to London and afford a place to stay. He shadowed camera operators for two days, "and it instantly clicked. It made me realise my passion lay within cinematography, meeting people and telling their stories."

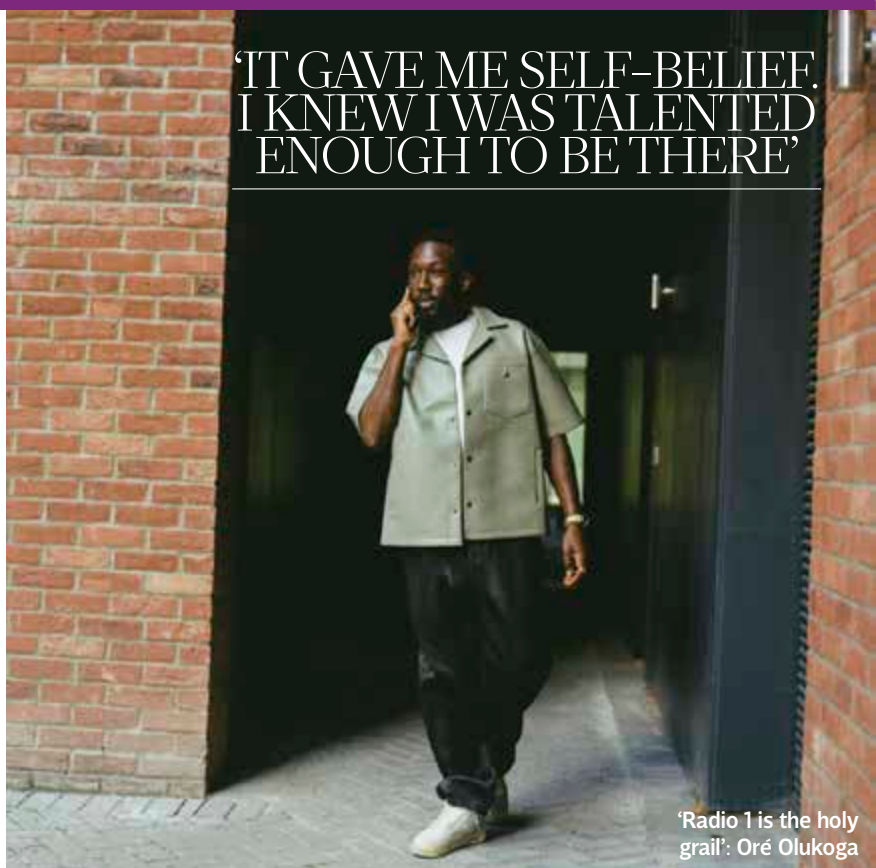
After winning Sky's Mick Deane scholarship, which involved a year-long apprenticeship, he gained a full-time position at the broadcaster. "The real learning curve," he says, "is filming on the ground. A lot of the time, you only get one chance to shoot stuff, so you have to aim for perfection on every single shot."

One of the first high-profile stories he covered was as a pool camera operator at a royal event featuring Prince William and Prince Harry. This meant he would be distributing his footage to multiple broadcasters. "That was a lot of pressure, and I didn't stop recording. The event was an hour and a half, and I came out with an hour and a half."

Memory cards were fed to various news stations in real time, which meant Massey had to stand there while all of them received, and watched, every minute of his nervy footage. "There were shots of the floor and stuff as I walked around," he cringes.

How do you learn to deal with this speed and pressure? "You adapt to the pressures and time restrictions. Working in a war zone definitely increases those pressures, but your previous experience carries you through." ■

**'YOU OFTEN
GET ONLY ONE
CHANCE TO
SHOOT, SO
YOU AIM FOR
PERFECTION'**



Oré Olukoga

A lot of people rely on Radio 1 and the buoyant tones of Greg James to coax them out of bed in the morning. But for Oré Olukoga, the station has always meant much more than that. "It's the holy grail," he says.

He started in community radio. First came Jamrock Radio in his hometown of Luton, but it was Rezz Radio, the south London-based station, that "changed the course of my life". It was the perfect low-stakes training ground, while still landing him high-profile interviews, including five minutes with then Mayor of London Boris Johnson. "I must have been 16 or 17. Don't ask me what I asked him.

"Anyone and everyone in that world of black music and entertainment came through the doors of Rezz," he recalls. He still has emails from Stormzy, sending him music, back in 2014. Three years later, he handed over his show to none other than comedian Munya Chawawa.

Before attending university to study broadcast journalism, he secured a two-month internship at Radio 1. "I always said to myself: if I get in the building, I'll figure out a way to pivot [to presenter]." Landing a place as an RTS Bursary Scholar helped "give me that self-belief", he says. "It was like,

no, I'm worthy of being here. I'm talented enough to be in these rooms."

After graduating and jobs at Sony Music and RCA Records, he worked as an assistant producer for production company TBI Media. Among his clients were BBC Radio 1Xtra and the BBC Asian Network. He was back in the building.

But the next step would force him to throw caution to the wind and ignore a potential conflict of interest: submitting a demo tape to Radio 1's Christmas Takeover in 2022. The gamble paid off. After smashing the practice runs, he was given three shows to cover. "My dad's a cabbie, right? And he probably felt immense pride while he was driving around and telling people, 'That's my son on the radio.'"

He then sent an email to the PA of the Head of Radio 1, Aled Haydn Jones. In a testament to the long-term potential of networking, Haydn Jones remembered Olukoga from his first internship, eight years earlier. He said he'd make no promises, but would keep him in mind for future opportunities.

Sure enough, one came up barely a month later. Arielle Free, who did the Early Breakfast show, was presenting for Comic Relief, and they needed someone to cover her for a month.

Despite a 2.30am wake-up for a 5.00am start, during his first show he ►

► was overcome with emotion. Specifically, the handover to Greg James, whose show had long been a staple of his own morning routine.

He recalls a jaw-dropping conversation he had with Haydn Jones about Radio 1's listenership. According to the station head, the Early Breakfast show gets an average 2.5 million listeners. "Two and a half million people have heard me talk about my lactose intolerance!" says Olukoga.

He is now a regular cover presenter for the station, and when we speak, he is weeks away from his biggest gig to date. The Lutonian will be circling back to his hometown to present Radio 1's Big Weekend, introducing the likes of Coldplay and Raye.

It's here that he pulls up an old tweet to show me, sent on 24 December 2012. It reads: "I'm gonna get to Radio 1 & 1Xtra one day, mark my words." ■

Suzanne Pearson

Finishing school, and all the career-defining decisions that come with it, is enough to make any pupil anxious. For Suzanne Pearson, the stakes were especially high. "When you see your parents struggle financially, and the consequences of that, you realise how big a risk it is to go into less stable creative industries," she recalls.

That was why, "for my A-levels, I did safe subjects: biology, Spanish, English and maths". But watching Tim

'EVERYONE HAD A MACBOOK. AND I WAS SITTING THERE WITH AN OLD, DYING DELL'

Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* in an earlier art lesson had awakened a love for film-making, which she pursued at Saturday courses run by the BFI at Sheffield's Showroom Workstation. "It came down to: do I go into science? Or do this rogue thing where I might never get paid a day in my life?"

Her initial plan was to dive headfirst into the industry. But when she was 17, her mother died. University offered "a good way to have a bit of stability".

She chose to study film and TV production at the University of York. While working in a café, she took a call from Anne Dawson, then Bursaries Consultant for the RTS, who told her that she'd made the inaugural scheme. It was an emotional conversation. "It was just that I [knew I had] a safety net now," explains Pearson.

Financially, it was not a level playing field on creative courses like hers. "It did feel like everyone had a MacBook, and I was sitting with a seven-year-old Dell that was dying."

As well as enabling her to buy a new laptop, the bursary introduced

her to other RTS scholars like her. "I realised [...] there are people on the same level I can talk to now."

Regular volunteering at Sheffield DocFest had attracted her to the "big impact" and deeper research demands of documentaries. So, after university, the RTS put her in touch with talent managers at All3Media, and she landed her first job – as a runner at Raw TV.

Soon she was losing herself in the labyrinthine corridors of Heathrow, sniffing out stories for ITV's *Britain's Busiest Airport*. Then getting her hands dirty on location for Discovery UK's *Born Mucky: Life on the Farm*.

But all the travel and long, unpredictable hours proved taxing. Burnt out after a detour in development, she took the chance during the pandemic to reskill in marketing and worked for a charity in its comms and campaigns department.

Then another call with Dawson reminded her of her need for a more creative outlet. "She was like, 'Suzanne, you still need to do something more creative.' Then this content producer role at the BBC came up. It's only maternity cover, so I don't know what's happening after that, but it's marketing for children's apps and games, and I really love it."

Pearson says it's this permanent network, and steadfast cheerleading, that sets the RTS bursary scheme apart. In other words, she says, "you get an Anne". ■



A love of film-making:
Suzanne Pearson at work

OUR FRIEND IN THE NORTH WEST

I've always loved going on rollercoasters: the sharp curves, sudden changes of direction and speed – a few minutes of pleasure to take you out of the norm. But too much of anything is never good, is it? And it feels like our industry has been on this particular ride for too long.

I can't really compare these last few years since Covid to a fairground ride. It's certainly not as enjoyable. But, in the North West, us TV folk like a challenge. We rise to it. The ups and downs are something we have always ridden.

There's a rich history here of grit, determination and a desire to "just get on and find a way".

Yet now, since we crossed the halfway line of 2024, I feel like it's time to get off this rollercoaster and start looking at how we can diversify, collaborate and find new revenue streams.

With the downturn in 2020-21, followed by the see-saw effect of over-commissioning in 2022, we were all trying to find our balance. Perhaps, as we lifted our heads last year to see if things would steady, we didn't anticipate that this would spell real trouble for TV producers.

We hadn't bargained for an economic downturn, rise in interest rates, slump in ad revenue and brands falling in love with every other platform apart from linear TV. Did I mention the writers' strikes? And throw in the rapid rise of AI, as well.

So what now? It is great to see that, as an industry, we are keen to rally round and find solutions. I think this is what we do best.

Some genres are flourishing – it's brilliant to see drama and reality



Ben Smith

Helen Tonge hopes for a better ride for the screen sector as she seeks ways to help struggling freelancers

flying high – and, as always, Manchester and the North West lead the way in these.

If you have a returnable series, then the chances are that you'll find a green light this year. Crime also continues to do well, but overall commissioning spend is down considerably.

I recently attended a wonderful roundtable event organised by the Film and TV Charity. We discussed how we, as company owners, are doing, and how we can find new ways to support freelancers.

Some of the experiences were tough to hear about. In July, Bectu announced that a staggering 52% of the UK film and TV workforce was out of work. Yet, in some ways, this was an improvement – in February, the figure was 68%. But the recovery has been slow.

However, I felt buoyed at how the various agencies have been pulling together. The Film and TV Charity is providing support in the form of grants, counselling and creating a resource called the Whole Picture Toolkit to encourage mentally healthy productions. There are also fundraisers, webinars and the offer of free workspace in London.

Teaming up with the likes of RTS North West and Screen Manchester, and engaging with Andy Burnham, the Mayor of Greater Manchester, shows how we are all dedicated to finding solutions.

And then there's the conversation about digital. It is an area championed and supported heavily in Manchester, arguably more so than television, so maybe now is the time for that to change?

For there to be real collaboration and to foster creativity, digital content offers an opportunity to develop something new.

Don't get me wrong. There are pockets of brilliance out there, but it still feels a bit siloed, with no obvious path forward.

We have an unbelievable wealth of talent in this country. The world has always looked to us for quality TV production. We've been industry leaders for decades.

Now it's important to stay strong and pivot during this industrial revolution to help shape a future that our disheartened freelancers want to return to, and young, eager students want to work in.

Right, I'm off to ask ChatGPT what to do! ■

Helen Tonge is CEO of Title Role Productions. Its series include *The Cruise: Fun-loving Brits at Sea* and *Crimes That Shook Britain*.

A dynamic new way to elevate TV talent

The RTS Mini MBA is an online course designed to raise the bar in media education. RTS Chief Executive **Theresa Wise** unveils an initiative aimed at transforming careers

Was it the success of the RTS bursary scheme that led you to launch a Mini MBA?

Theresa Wise: A few things came together. We're an educational charity with a history of educating people at all levels. During the pandemic, we saw a rapid expansion of online learning and the development of complex learning management systems featuring lots of interactivity and capability. Previous generations

of remote-learning technologies – video conferences or, back in the day, CD-ROMs or the Open University “talk and chalk” lectures – maybe had less ability to engage.

From initial conversations and detailed qualitative research, it became apparent there was a gap in the professional television educational market to provide a course in which people could learn comprehensively about the business of our industries. I realised the RTS was uniquely placed to play a role in putting together something that would benefit the industry and play to the Society's core charitable objectives. The Trustees were very supportive.

Crucially, the RTS has fantastic access to people with great insights and industry experience who we could bring directly to learners. Senior executives have told me: “I wish something like this had been available earlier in my career.”

How important is this for the RTS?

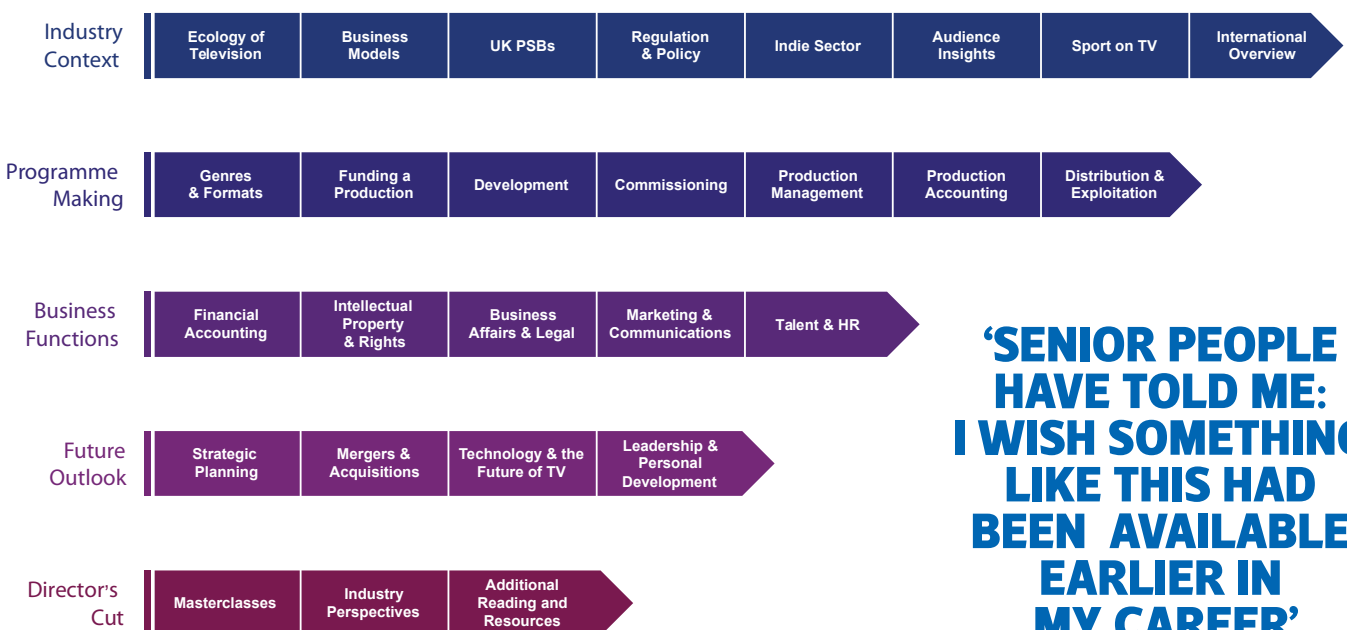
It's the biggest thing we've done

since launching our bursary scheme 10 years ago. It has involved a lot of work and investment. We've been in development for two years. Nothing like this – with a television and streaming lens – exists elsewhere. There's a wealth of knowledge in people's heads, but it's not written down in one place anywhere.

What exactly does the course offer?

It's CPD (Continuing Professional Development)-accredited, with four themed streams and 24 modules sitting underneath. Stream 1 is Industry Context, and the modules include Ecology of Television, looking at the structure of the industry and the parts played by different organisations. Then there's Business Models, which talks about the players' revenues, costs and how they do business with each other.

The third module examines the UK's public service broadcasters, their history, purposes and how they differ. The fourth is Regulation and Policy. Regulatory interventions have made huge



‘SENIOR PEOPLE HAVE TOLD ME: I WISH SOMETHING LIKE THIS HAD BEEN AVAILABLE EARLIER IN MY CAREER’

differences to our industry's health, particularly legislation that allowed production companies to keep their own intellectual property, and prior to that, the birth of Channel 4.

We also have a module on the independent production sector, and one on audience insight, looking at how advertising is bought. There's a module called Sport on TV – sport has changed the fortunes of television and vice versa – and International Overview, because it's important to understand how territories outside the UK work.

The second stream is called Programme Making and also looks at varying models of funding a show. The process of developing a show is examined, the difference between scripted and unscripted, and the business of commissioning. Then there's the Production Management module: what is involved in delivering a show on time and to budget?

There are great case studies throughout. One is *Got Talent* – a hugely successful global format – and another is *A Gentleman in Moscow*, a lovely, high-end drama. There's a module called Production Accounting – a discipline in itself – and our final module in this stream is Distribution and Exploitation.

The third stream, Business Functions, looks at key departments that support the business and programme-making. We'll highlight financial accounting, rights and intellectual property (where we're supported by the amazing legal firm Wiggin), business affairs and legal, and marketing and comms. We examine what is specific about the TV industry that marketing and comms need to serve and how they measure their return on marketing investment.

We look at HR and talent management, including areas such as health and safety, duty of care and diversity and inclusion considerations.

The fourth stream is Future Outlook, examining through a TV and streaming lens how you build a business case and what to think about when formulating a strategy. There's a module called Mergers and Acquisitions, since we're a deal-intensive sector. And, of course, we look at technology and the future of TV, including a discussion on AI. There's also a module called Leadership and Personal Development.

There's a section entitled Director's Cut, where learners take a deep dive into a wide range of topics. There is access to previous RTS Conventions,



'Nothing like this exists elsewhere': Theresa Wise

Richard Kendal

Television magazine articles and our events archive. Overall, the course runs to 75-80 hours of learning.

When is it out and what's the cost?

We're launching at IBC this month, and our first learners can start in January 2025. It's priced at £3,250 plus VAT but is free to all our past and present Bursary Scholars.

Who is the RTS Academy aimed at?

It's for anyone who wants to understand more about the business of television, with people in their mid-20s to 40 likely to gain most, but it's not restricted to that age range. They could work in a big TV or streaming organisation or any body that supports our industry – a regulator, government department, consultancy, tech, law or accountancy firm. There are many companies that serve the TV and streaming media industries who want their teams to understand more about it. This is a way for people who work in television and supporting services to turbocharge their talent.

So everything is delivered online?

Yes, but there are interactive elements, including online forums where learners can share insights. Our industry contributors will deliver webinars on particular topics that people can watch live. The RTS runs many in-person events throughout the year. We'll be inviting our learners to some of those so they can meet each other and

discuss what they consider to be hot topics. Given that the course is self-paced and online, people might come across things at different speeds.

You must be delighted that so many industry luminaries are contributing to the course...

We have been exceptionally lucky in having more than 100 industry leaders and practitioners contributing via videos and case studies. These include our Chair, Jane Turton; Vice Chair, Simon Pitts; the BBC's Kate Phillips, who talks about commissioning, as does Sky's Zai Bennett; and UKTV's Richard Watsham. On production, we've got Stephen Lambert of Studio Lambert, Patrick Holland from Banijay, and Fremantle's Amelia Brown. We have some huge dealmakers such as Liberty's Mike Fries and Andrew Georgiou from Warner Bros. Discovery, as well as Priya Dogra, who's just landed at Sky, and Sarah Rose from Paramount.

How will the course be assessed?

There are two types of assessment: formative and summative. The latter is scored and is done online. Exercises have to be passed before proceeding to the next stream. The formative assessment checks your knowledge as you proceed. At the end, there's an optional dissertation. Those who complete this to a good standard earn a distinction. ■

Interview by Steve Clarke



Bridgerton and beyond

Anna Mallett, Netflix's UK production chief and Chair of the RTS London Convention, tells **Steve Clarke** why Britain's screen sector is second to none

For someone responsible for ensuring that the UK production pipeline for the world's biggest streamer runs smoothly, Anna Mallett sounds very composed.

But then this highly experienced executive spent 13 years at the BBC – where she ended up as Managing Director, Production, at BBC Studios – and knows the UK production business inside out.

“It has been really fulfilling to see how Netflix has evolved production as our organisation has moved to a more local approach. This has entailed ensuring we have the right skills and capabilities to support productions now we're focusing on local commissioning,” says Mallett, who is Vice President, Production, EMEA/UK.

“I'm lucky because I'm able to look across the UK and EMEA [Europe, Middle East, Africa]. It's important to think about how we can continue to innovate and raise our game.”

She has been at Netflix since 2021 when she left ITN, having served for two years as its first female CEO, steering the company through the disruption of the first phase of the pandemic.

“It was a privilege to be at ITN,” Mallett recalls. “It's an amazing organisation with an important purpose. What attracted me to Netflix was the global scale. Over half a billion people watch it. I don't think any company has tried to entertain an audience at that scale. It was an opportunity I couldn't miss.”

She adds: “The main difference between working for Netflix compared with ITN and the BBC is there is a lot of focus on individual responsibility. Freedom as well. Decision-making can happen more quickly, perhaps, than at other organisations. It is a highly entrepreneurial culture that feels distinct to Netflix, which I've found energising.

“But one thing that unifies Netflix, ITN and the BBC is a focus on creativity. Creativity is at the heart of all those organisations. That's why I absolutely love working in media.”

Netflix is the principal sponsor of this month's RTS London Convention, “The next episode: keeping our creative edge”, which Mallett is chairing. Speakers include industry luminaries such as Jane Featherstone, Co-Founder and CCO, *Sister*; Andrew Georgiou, President & MD, Warner Bros. Discovery UK & Ireland and WBD Sports Europe; Anne Mensah, Vice-President of Content for UK Netflix; the heads of

the UK PSBs and Ted Sarandos, Co-CEO Netflix. Added to that stellar line-up is Kirsty Wark, who recently stood down from *Newsnight*, Andy Wilman, producer of *The Grand Tour* and *Clarkson's Farm*, and podcast stalwarts Marina Hyde and Richard Osman.

Mallett says: "I'm looking forward to hearing keynotes from some of the most important leaders in our industry. It's fantastic to have the leaders of the PSBs with us. And I'm particularly excited to hear Ted speak."

The UK is Netflix's biggest production hub outside the US. Mallett, who oversees a staff of around 200 people, has spoken widely of the advantages the UK offers to TV and film producers. None of us needs reminding that some of Netflix's most successful shows – *The Crown*, *Bridgerton* and *Sex Education* – have been made in Britain, generating hundreds of millions of pounds for our economy and creating thousands of jobs.

In June, the streamer released numbers showing the so-called "Bridgerton universe" had contributed more than £275m to the UK economy, helping support 5,000 businesses. Last year, Netflix announced that, between 2020 and 2023, it had invested \$6bn in the UK creative industry, an amount that was unthinkable when the streamer launched in the UK in 2012.

"The UK has this wonderful production heritage. It's an industry that has developed over many years and is second to none," says Mallett. "It has a wonderful talent base, facilities and infrastructure. Also, the UK's got some of the world's best storytellers. All this gives it real creative edge on the world stage."

How, then, can it keep that creative edge during challenging times when commissioning has stalled in many



Luke Newton and Nicola Coughlan in *Bridgerton*

Netflix

areas? "Like many others, we were impacted by the strikes in the US, but our commitment in terms of the amount we're commissioning hasn't changed. We definitely want to play our part. We decided the Convention theme should be 'Keeping our creative edge' because clearly there are challenges – financial, creative and technological. We need to talk about how we can focus on what we're great at and leverage future opportunities, as well as tackling difficulties."

She adds: "For all media companies, there is a challenge around audience. There is a proliferation of choice and huge competition for share of time. One of the good things about Netflix is that we like competition. Not only [because] all boats rise when there is competition, but healthy competition ensures we find new ways to tell our stories and stand out. Our TV industry is already world-beating but it's more important than ever that we retain our creative and competitive edge."

Mallett has attended numerous RTS conferences over the years during a

career that began at the Boston Consulting Group, specialising in media and retail. She read geography at Durham University before studying for a doctorate at Oxford on John Martin, the 19th-century landscape painter and

'THE UK HAS A WONDERFUL TALENT BASE AND SOME OF THE WORLD'S BEST STORYTELLERS'

engineer. Recognising her leadership potential, Boston sent her to Harvard Business School.

Asked to describe a typical working day at Netflix, she says one great thing about working for the streamer is that every day is different. "I never know what exciting opportunity or challenge is going to come up, but I spend a lot of time working with the production teams in different countries."

Talking about the London Convention, she says that she is delighted to be its Chair, and relishes the opportunity for industry leaders to come together and explore different perspectives and ideas.

"You can't achieve that as successfully through a virtual meeting," she says. "Netflix is hugely honoured to be the RTS London Convention's principal sponsor. I think we're the first streamer to do this. We feel incredibly lucky to have this opportunity. We're committed to the UK for the long term and are part of its ecosystem." ■

What I watch at home ...

'I loved *One Day*. I watched it on a plane and started crying. People gave me funny looks. And I thought *The Gentlemen* was really energising.'

She is also a *Bridgerton* fan and thought *Beckham* was 'fantastic': 'It gave a great insight into him and his challenges – difficult things that happened when he was very young. It was a brilliant and intimate documentary.'

She also enjoys 'a lot of non-Netflix shows', citing *Clarkson's Farm* – 'It's

such good fun and so imaginative' – and *Ted Lasso*. 'You know, I live in Richmond [where the show is set].'

The Great British Sewing Bee is a show she finds 'so absorbing'. She adds: 'I watch a wide range of shows. There's no one type of TV that I go for.'

'As for podcasts, I'm a big fan of *The Rest is Entertainment*, *The Rest is History* and *The Rest is Politics*. You feel you get to a new level in the issues, so I love those.'

The true power of the Paralympics

Has anyone managed to catch any Olympics and Paralympics TV coverage? Lol, I'm joking - you'd need to have spent six weeks on Mars to miss it.

TV has always had the power to influence society, going beyond merely reflecting it. This includes the power to influence our attitudes to disability and inclusion. For a couple of glorious weeks every four years, our screens are full of disabled people. There are the Paralympians themselves, the disabled presenters and reporters, and the disabled talent behind the screens.

This visibility is absolutely to be welcomed, but it raises two questions: how do we turn this fortnight into something longer lasting? And what difference does what we see on TV make to the way disabled people are perceived? On the much-discussed first question, are things improving in terms of representation and inclusion?

Channel 4's coverage of the event in 2012 gave disabled athletes their breakthrough moment. **Katy Boulton** tells how it transformed attitudes

Yes, they are. Is there still a way to go? Too right there is. The much-quoted Diamond data shows 8.2% of onscreen and 6.5% of offscreen disabled representation versus a working-aged disabled population of 23%. Yet initiatives such as TAP (the TV Access Project), the training of more access coordinators and the work of organisations such as TripleC are all helping to support broadcasters and producers make a positive change.

However, the focus of this piece is on the second question, which is how TV and its coverage of events such as the

Paralympics affects society's perceptions of disabled people.

First, some history. The idea for a disabled games began at Stoke Mandeville Hospital in 1948 as a competition for people who sustained spinal injuries in the war. The first Paralympics by name took place in 1960 in Rome, with 400 competitors. Montreal (1976) saw the first (largely recorded) TV coverage. Barcelona (1992) was "the first time there was solid television coverage" in the UK, according to 11-time champion Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson. The BBC provided the coverage. And in Sydney (2000), the Paralympics reached an estimated worldwide audience of 300 million, according to olympics.com.

Then came London 2012, and the big breakthrough when Channel 4 covered the Paralympics for the first time. Athletes such as Ellie Simmonds, Sarah Storey, Jonnie Peacock and many more became household names. So did presenters, especially Adam Hills and



Channel 4's 2024 Paralympics team in Paris

Channel 4

Alex Brooker. Channel 4 broadcast more than 150 hours of live action, achieving a record total UK audience of 39.9 million.

Channel 4 promised its coverage would “be fearless, demystifying the difficulties and challenges facing Paralympic athletes while celebrating their sporting achievement”. It would “feel more intimate, breaking down barriers between the athletes and the audience, all the time emphasising their sporting achievement”.

For the first time in the UK, the Paralympics wasn’t something added on. It was the main event.

The coverage was spearheaded by the “Superhumans” marketing campaign – cinematic, eye-catching and ubiquitous, although not without controversy. Dancer and model Monique Jarrett, a short-statured wheelchair user who danced at the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics homecoming event, remembers how “Superhumans” changed perceptions overnight: “After 2012, we were suddenly seen by the public as Paralympians. I’d be going about my own business, going to Tesco, reaching for a tin of beans. And people were like, ‘ooh, you’re a Paralympian’. I’m like, ‘no’. It went from one extreme to another in the way people viewed disabled people.”

Deaf journalist and scriptwriter Charlie Swinbourne says that “this was when disabled people were being very negatively portrayed by politicians, and benefits were being cut. The narrative was scroungers on the one hand and superhumans on the other.”

In his 2012 closing ceremony speech, the Chairman of the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, Lord Sebastian Coe, said British people would never think of disability the same way. Research in 2012 found that 65% of the public agreed that the Paralympics had delivered a breakthrough in the way disabled people are viewed in the UK.

In 2012 and 2016 (Rio), Paralympians were “Superhumans”. By 2020 (Tokyo) they were “Super. Human” – still super, but with more of an emphasis on the human ups and downs. In Paris, the “super” has been dropped entirely, and we see the Paralympians as humans, albeit humans who are extraordinary athletes.

Disabled actor and writer Melissa Johns says: “It’s about showing people who are inspirational athletes, judging them on their talent rather than the



Channel 4

hurdles they’ve had to get over that society put in their way. Nowadays, when people say to me, ‘You could have been a Paralympian’, my response is, ‘You could have been an Olympian’, because I’ve realised it’s the exact same thing.”

And there’s a disconnect between the 2012 research and more recent findings from the disability equality charity Scope, which found a big difference between public perceptions of disability and disabled people’s perceptions: one in three disabled people felt there was still a lot of disability prejudice in Britain today, but only one in five non-disabled people agreed.

Non-disabled people might believe there’s less prejudice and link that to events like the Paralympics. But that doesn’t necessarily play out in disabled people’s lived experience. They are twice as likely to be unemployed as the rest of the population. They still live in the shadow of the pandemic narrative where their lives were seen as less valuable than those without “underlying health conditions”.

So where does all this leave us in September 2024? Is Jarrett once again being compared with a Paralympian every time she buys a tin of beans? I

‘IN 2012, FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE PARALYMPICS IN THE UK WASN’T JUST AN ADD-ON. IT WAS THE MAIN EVENT’

suspect she probably is. But I also think people are more inclined to see Paralympians as supreme athletes first and foremost than 12 years ago. And that’s due in part to the way Channel 4 is covering the 2024 games, with competitors shown as athletes first.

Swinbourne says: “The Paralympics is always an opportunity for people on- and offscreen to build their careers and go on to work on other types of programmes. We’re seeing more representation than we used to.

“But there’s still a lot more we should be seeing. Hopefully, this year will be another step towards that process of disabled people becoming more visible. We’ve seen progress over the last five years. Where we do see disabled people on screen, sometimes their disability is incidental, or sometimes it’s part of the story.

“It has moved forward and it’s become so much more normalised. That’s the power of television. Sport can do that, too. When you bring sport and television together, it’s powerful.”

The last word goes to Jarrett: “To be honest, I would love to see a natural mix of disabled and non-disabled people on TV, and disabled people in shows that don’t necessarily focus on disability. Because that is what society is in real life – disabled people don’t wake up and their whole day is about disability. It really isn’t!

“I want to see us involved in everything on our screens. I want it to be everyday. Oh ... but to also have a few superstars at Beyoncé level – but disabled. That’d be great!” ■

Katy Boulton is the Strategy and Operations Lead at TripleC.

Cops, robbers and racism



Parminder Nagra
as DI Rachita Ray

ITV

ITV police drama *DI Ray*, which returns for a second series next month, boasts both a showrunner and a star of south Asian heritage. Surely that's a first for a British primetime drama?

Creator, writer and executive producer Maya Sondhi is debating this question at ITV's west London HQ with Parminder Nagra, who plays the show's eponymous lead. Sondhi concludes: "It's exciting either way. I didn't grow up watching a south Asian female lead in shows. To have that now for my daughter and the younger generations shows we can do everything."

Writing the character of DI Rachita Ray, says Sondhi, allows her to "explore identity" but "she's also a really good police officer in her own right, and that's the key [to the show]".

"She's chasing justice – at whatever cost," chips in Nagra, who rose to fame as Jess in *Bend It Like Beckham*, the 2002 feature film that, along with the BBC sketch show *Goodness Gracious Me*, was

Back for series 2, *DI Ray* chases justice while also smashing stereotypes. The show's creator and star talk to **Matthew Bell**

a trailblazer in breaking south Asian talent. The much-loved movie was co-written, co-produced and directed by Gurinder Chadha. Nagra went on to star in US medical drama *ER*.

By the end of series 1 of *DI Ray*, Rachita Ray's life, professional and private, is in tatters; having been cynically chosen to solve the murder of an Asian man to meet the "ethnic needs of the case", she is then betrayed by her corrupt cop fiancé and suspended.

In series 2, she returns to duty when the murder of a crime boss – "even stone cold, you wouldn't cross him,"

says loyal sidekick DS Clive Bottomley (Steve Oram) – risks igniting a gang war in Birmingham.

DI Ray is made by Jed Mercurio's indie HTM Television. Sondhi starred in three series of his hit drama *Line of Duty* before, in typically brutal Mercurio fashion, her character, PC Maneet Bindra, had her throat slit.

Combining acting with writing, Sondhi had already penned episodes of *The Kumars* and *EastEnders* but "wanted to write about identity". She explains: "When I talked to Jed, he said, 'That's quite niche, but if you wrap it up into something that everyone recognises, like a police procedural, then you can get to the people who watch those and then throw in other stuff.' It felt like a very rich ground to explore.

"The trick with the second series was to keep the USP of the show – it's dealing with identity, race and micro aggressions, but it's not banging you over the head with it."

Nagra was drawn to the role by the

“pedigree” of the team behind it: “It’s rare when the stars align in that way in this profession. I wanted to play something gritty and be able to represent someone we don’t often see on our TV screens.”

The Leicester-born but now LA-based actor also enjoyed not having to change her accent. “I’ve done a cop show in the States with an American accent, but I can’t say ‘murder’... I just try and say it very quickly and hope nobody notices. Coming back to the UK, you can talk how you talk without having to put on the extra layer of an accent.”

She adds: “On a British set, there is a shorthand and humour. When you make a joke, people understand. By the time you’ve explained the joke [in the States], it’s not funny any more.”

Rachita Ray is a complex woman, calm on the surface, anything but below. Both the writing and Nagra’s performance favour nuance over tub-thumping. “Everything isn’t black and white,” she says. “No, it’s Asian,” says the rapier-quick Sondhi. “Very good – you should write,” ripostes Nagra, to general hilarity.

As you’d expect with a drama from the Mercurio stable, there are frequent twists and a rising body count. “Jed’s very hands-on and is on set a lot,” reveals Nagra. Sondhi adds: “He’s got a proper crime-drama brain. When he comes in with notes, it’s like putting a logic puzzle together. I’ve learned a lot... I’ve had to take out texture for [the benefit] of the plot. I got upset about it, but I understand why now.

“You’ve got to keep people hooked. Now there’s so much stuff to watch that, if people aren’t hooked, they’ll go to something else. That’s what Jed does really well. I’d just have two actors talking in a room for ages – there’d be a lot of jokes but nothing would happen.”

DI Ray was shot in and around Birmingham last summer. After years of neglect, Britain’s second city is on the rise as a TV and film base. First came Steven Knight’s epic crime series *Peaky Blinders*. This month, his brainchild,

Digbeth Loc. Studios, is due to open its doors to make the much anticipated *Peaky Blinders* feature film.

Sondhi was born and raised in Birmingham. “I left when I was 18 to come to London for drama school, but ‘home’ on my phone is my parents’ landline number – I still feel very connected to it. I’m very proud we’re getting to see more of Birmingham.”



Maya Sondhi

David Reiss

‘I DON’T SLEEP IF I’M WRITING A SCRIPT. MY HUSBAND TALKS TO ME BUT I’M NOT HEARING A WORD OF IT’

For the six-part second series, Sarah Deane, the creator of Channel 5 drama *Compulsion*, pens two episodes. “She’s an amazing writer – a Liverpudlian, and she’s got a lot of the class stuff,” says Sondhi.

“Birmingham and Liverpool, I think, are quite similar in terms of the mix of socio-economic backgrounds, so we had a shorthand immediately.”

Scripting TV drama can overwhelm, admits Sondhi. “People ask me how I do it with a young family, but it really focuses your mind because I’ve got [a certain] amount of time to get it done before I have to be mum... you just have to do it because people need scripts to work off.

“I don’t really sleep when I’m writing a script because I’m thinking about it constantly. It’s all-consuming and my husband has a hard time when I’m in the zone. He’s talking to me, but he knows I’m not listening to a word he’s saying – the food could be burning or there’s a child that needs a bum wiped.”

Not that acting is any easier, especially in *DI Ray*, reckons Nagra. “This show is hard to get any distance from – the character is always with you,” she says. “*DI Ray* is one of the hardest jobs I’ve ever had. On *ER* [with an ensemble cast], people were sharing the workload, and here I am in [virtually] every scene and she goes through the mill.”

Sondhi still acts, although more sparingly now. “I have to choose really carefully what acting jobs I go for – I can’t be away for too long because my children are very small,” she says. “I just did an episode of *Grace*, and it was so nice to be on set with no responsibility. It was like: ‘You dress me and put make-up on my face, we have a laugh, I get some lunch, I do my words, I go home.’ No school assemblies to watch, no exec producing – it was really refreshing.”

Will there be more *DI Ray*? “I’m already thinking about series 3 plots if it were to happen,” says Sondhi.

She adds: “As long as Parminder’s up for it ... we’d be screwed if she wasn’t, because it’s called *DI Ray*!” ■

***DI Ray* series 2 is due to air on ITV1 in early October.**

Joe Molander lifts the lid on the struggle to bring hard-hitting current affairs shows to our screens

Fearless or thankless? The state of investigative journalism

Investigative journalism has been having a tough time of it lately. In the broadcast space, Vice, once feted for its original and irreverent reporting, this year announced it would stop publishing new content. BBC Two current affairs flagship *Newsnight* was also cut by 10 minutes and deprived of top reporters such as its Diplomatic Editor, Mark Urban. Hundreds of jobs were lost at Vice, while more than 30 staff have been laid off at *Newsnight*.

Tellingly, in February, Isobel Yeung accepted the award for On-Demand Journalism at the RTS Television Journalism Awards for her work with Vice, the day after the once-unstoppable organisation made her redundant.

As the industry continues to tighten its belt, investigations are an increasingly hard sell. They soak up time and resources, tend not to be ratings winners and run the risk of litigation. "It's a harder and harder environment to work in for a number of reasons," says David Modell, whose company David Modell Productions makes documentaries for, among others, the BBC's *Panorama*. Commissions are both rarer and less remunerative than before, he told *Television*. He predicts investigative broadcast work will become even more precarious, and that companies like his "just won't be able to continue".

"A lot of current affairs is made by

smaller companies who are all having a really tough time at the moment," says Tom Porter, Creative Director for production company BriteSpark Films, which has worked with *Panorama* and Channel 4's *Dispatches*. He forecasts that independents will consolidate to the point where there are just a small number of "mega-indies" left standing.

"The question, then, is: does current affairs production fit into that?" he says. "Is it still something those mega-indies want to be doing? Because it doesn't make money. You do it for the passion and love of it."

However, Porter emphasises that the slowdown is "much worse" in genres

outside current affairs TV. Public service broadcasters such as the BBC, ITV and Channel 4 are obliged to help "preserve" current affairs, he says.

By their nature, topical programmes can't always be run as repeats for long, unlike their scripted cousins. Commissioners need to maintain a strong pipeline of new programmes, notes Samuel Palmer of Cheeky Scamp Films. "You can't show me a [current affairs] film you made a year ago and expect me to be as interested, because it's not about now," says Palmer, who has also made films for *Panorama*.

Some programme-makers are more sceptical, though. "I would question



Daniel Hewitt investigates for ITV News

ITV



Isobel Yeung (right) conducts an interview in *Stealing Ukraine's Children: Inside Russia's Camps*

Vice

Camps, focused on accusations of abduction following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Despite forming the crux of the International Criminal Court and Council of Europe's allegations of genocide against Russia, Yeung noticed that the abductions were receiving minimal investigative coverage. So she went to Russia. She and her team were tracked and followed multiple times, but still managed to land an exclusive interview with Russia's "children's commissioner". Yeung's first question was: "Are you a war criminal?"

Vice may be no more, but its influence lingers. A journalist with experience at a major online news outlet explained that their "laidback" culture helped rather than hindered the work. "I would use it to my advantage," the journalist says. "With the networks, I would have to take a bunch of security with me. [At the online outlet] we had protocols, but... if I felt like it was more beneficial not to have a white ex-military dude with us going into Ethiopia, or wherever, that was allowed."

Also filling in gaps left by networks are smaller investigative groups. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism has worked with ITV News, Channel 4's *Dispatches* and *Panorama*. Franz Wild, the Bureau's Editor and a veteran investigative journalist, says he hasn't observed a major decline in opportunities for collaboration with broadcasters.

A BBC spokesperson says that, despite changes to *Newsnight*, it is "investing more in investigative journalism". They pointed to recent *Panorama* programmes on the Probation Service and abuse at a special educational needs school. "*Panorama* is shown weekly, in a primetime slot on BBC One, and we show current affairs investigations in primetime slots across our terrestrial channels," the spokesperson adds.

As smaller, online-focused outlets proliferate, though, "the danger is the landscape will become more diffuse", says Richard Watson, an investigative reporter who recently left *Newsnight* after 25 years. "The stories will be out there, but they might have less impact."

Thankfully, reporters are committed to their trade. Hewitt spoke to *Television* while on the road and filming for ITV News's general election coverage. Yeung spoke over Zoom, two weeks after giving birth. "The media landscape is a rodeo right now," concludes Wild. "You've got to do everything to stay in it." ■

whether the appetite for really adventurous, risky investigation is quite there," one film-maker says. "It's still there at the commissioner level, but is it there corporately like it was? Possibly not. Since Covid, and during Covid, there's been a general retreat to certainty." This means, he says, that production companies looking to pick up commissions and keep the lights on are pitching safer, less ambitious ideas.

Despite these testing times, reporters are still finding reasons to be cheerful. "I've spent nearly 50 years in a dying industry," jokes Dr Paul Lashmar, a former *World in Action* reporter and now Reader at London's City University. "If you want to do investigative journalism, you find a way to do it."

Daniel Hewitt, Investigations Editor at ITV News, spent three years looking into social housing, and is full of praise for the resources the broadcaster provided. "When we spot a story that we think has longevity and is important and requires time, [ITV] throws the kitchen sink at it," he says.

Hewitt worked with a team of three to comb through reams of correspondence from social housing tenants, and visited as many as they could. The team's findings helped trigger a parliamentary inquiry, at which Hewitt gave evidence in 2022. He began his remarks by thanking his colleagues – Imogen Barrer, Sarah O'Connell and

'THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE IS A RODEO NOW. YOU'VE GOT TO DO EVERYTHING TO STAY IN IT'

Sophie Alexander – by name. The next year, the law was reformed through the Social Housing (Regulation) Act.

Hewitt is clear that "we can't throw resources at every story: we have to pick and choose". He adds: "It takes a brave editor to have an enormous investigation team working on five or six stories that take months and months to make. No one can really afford to do that any more."

But Hewitt and his team have found ways to adapt. He points out that they have multiple documentaries and dozens of long-form articles to show for their years of work. "It's about changing the view of an investigation being one big 'hit'," he says. "You can build momentum with several pieces."

Change also brings opportunity: online outlets have proven to be nimble in a way that big broadcasters often struggle to match. Yeung's RTS award-winning documentary for Vice, *Stealing Ukraine's Children: Inside Russia's*

The woman who ate diamonds



Frank Dillane and Sophie Turner in the new ITV drama *Joan*

ITV

Defined by shoulder pads, cut-crease eyeshadow, stone-washed denim and statement haircuts, the unmistakable 1980s aesthetic is a gift for television. We've seen 80s Bristol in *The Fence*, London's 80s gay scene in *It's a Sin* and the early Diana years in *The Crown*. Now it's the turn of London's elite criminals in *Joan*.

The ITV series is inspired by the true story of Joan Hannington, one of Britain's most notorious jewel thieves. Hannington – played by Sophie Turner (*Game of Thrones*, *The Staircase*) – is desperate to make money quickly when social workers take her daughter, Kelly, into care. A life of crime presents itself when she begins work in an exclusive jewellery store and meets master

The incredible story of jewel thief Joan Hannington is now a glitzy ITV drama. **Shilpa Ganatra** goes behind the scenes

criminal Boisie (Frank Dillane of *Fear the Walking Dead* fame).

"If I'm going to get Kelly back, I need money," Hannington tells Boisie in the first episode's closing scene. "Proper money. I want to buy a house, six bedrooms, books in all the shelves, horse outside – fuck it, two horses. Money-money. Know what I mean?" Over five more high-octane episodes, we all find out what she means.

The idea of turning Hannington's autobiography into a series began in 2018 after Snowed-in Productions made *Mrs Wilson*, BBC One's three-part series about actor Ruth Wilson's real-life grandmother, who uncovers her husband's secret life. Energised by its success, the creative trio of producer Ruth Kenley-Letts, writer Anna Symon and director Richard Laxton wanted to work together again. Adapting Hannington's book, *I Am What I Am*, proved just the ticket.

"Joan's story was one of a kind," explains Symon, whose credits include Apple TV's *The Essex Serpent* and ITV's *Deep Water*. "The words 'mother' and 'thief' don't really go together in our society. The fact it was a female criminal and set in the 1980s, and was full of fashion and music, made me think people would enjoy it. Also, it had a

strong emotional storyline that I thought audiences would respond to.

"I also found Joan a fascinating character, because she's impulsive, dangerous and vulnerable – all mixed into one flawed character."

Rather than stick closely to fact, the series is "loosely inspired" by the book, says Symon. She took creative licence with the crimes Hannington commits to up the ante: "No one wants to watch someone do chequebook fraud over and over again!"

So Symon went beyond what Hannington actually did, like swallowing diamonds and switching rings. To create more drama, she added heists at key points. "The guiding point was that I wanted it to fit the emotional truth of her as a person. It was nerve-racking when the real-life Joan read the scripts, because I wanted it to feel representative of the person, even if I played with the events and chronology."

The series was initially developed with the BBC, which commissioned a script for the first episode. In the end, it opted not to go further. Kenley-Letts explains: "They develop a lot of shows and there was a lot of love for it, but they can't make them all. It's like when you go clothes shopping and have to pick between two dresses you want. In the end, you can only go with one."

Instead, they took it to ITV Head of Drama Polly Hill, who "loved it from the off". Kenley-Letts says: "It's a show that could work on so many different channels – it's not a specifically ITV or BBC show. It could have worked on Netflix, too. It's got a great protagonist at its centre: a complex character who's good at stealing diamonds. That's an attractive story to tell."

Yet it's also expensive to tell. The glamour of Hannington's high-flying life needed to be reflected in production values; period dramas require extra resources for aspects such as costume and location. Laxton, who also directed *Rain Dogs* and *Him & Her*, says: "We knew the real Joan loved clothes. She sent us some of her snaps, and she was on point for the 80s. But that meant we had a main character who was incredibly stylish. She was in every scene except 10 across six hours, and she changes her look all the time."

The 80s setting meant painstaking care had to be taken on both interior and exterior shots, and, given Hannington's many escapades, "the money was hoovered up", says Laxton. The production team sourced locations in

Birmingham to act as inner-London, which steadied the budget.

Still, there were some difficult decisions, like the inclusion of a trip to Spain for Hannington's first taste of the high life. Kenley-Letts says: "At one point, I thought we might not be able to afford to do it. But we fought to keep elements in because it was important. It's where Joan and Boisie fall in love, and it gives a sense of scale you don't get if you're wandering around

'SOPHIE WAS DELIGHTFUL TO WORK WITH. SHE'S A SUPERPOWER'



Birmingham, making it look like May-fair. It meant we could get some glamour into the show, which, for under £3m an hour, is an achievement"

ITV's blanket licence with the Performing Rights Society meant they could go to town with the soundtrack, so the onscreen action is set to a delectable mix of classic and 80s hits. The sultry *Wicked Game* by Chris Isaak plays when Hannington meets Boisie in a pub. *Club Tropicana* by Wham! fills the air as they sun themselves in Spain; they dance to ABC's *Poison Arrow* in a nightclub. "Everyone's falling in love with the soundtrack as part of the tapestry of the series," says Laxton.

Indeed, American broadcaster the CW Network came onboard as a junior partner during the production and ordered an alternate version with fewer big-name songs to match their

budget. But it eventually struck a deal with BritBox in the US, who wanted to keep the original soundtrack, "so they're coughing up for all of the tracks", says Kenley-Letts.

Heading up a cast that also includes Gershwyn Eustache Jr (*I May Destroy You*, *A Spy Among Friends*), Sophie Turner has so much onscreen time that the series largely hangs on her performance. Happily, her ease in shape-shifting is evident. There's precision in the way she adopts her many dual roles, like that of a high-flying thief and loving mother, or ballsy con artist and travel novice, in addition to the many personas she uses in her criminal exploits. "Sophie was delightful," says Laxton. "She fluffed just two lines in 90 days of filming. In my opinion, she's a superpower."

As the first series goes to air, there's

potential for the show to continue beyond the real-life source material, as we've seen with *Gomorrah* and *Call the Midwife*. The only creative caveat is from Hannington herself. Kenley-Letts says: "She said that if the series was successful and we went off piste with new storylines, she didn't want the onscreen Joan to get involved in drugs or prostitution. She would be uncomfortable with that."

Even with that proviso, the unique character of Joan is still rich enough to draw from. "I'm coming up with new ideas at the moment: new worlds for her, new characters to interact with, new crimes to commit," says Symon. "There's so much more that Joan is capable of." ■

Joan is due to air later this month on ITV1 and ITVX.

From true crime to reality TV – and, increasingly, drama based on real-life events – duty of care to programme contributors is now a key topic across the production community. Recent controversies around *Strictly Come Dancing* have only emphasised further the importance of duty of care procedures.

That's why the RTS hosted a timely "How to..." session to discuss the lengths producers must now go to in ensuring the best duty of care without compromising content.

On the panel were: Matthew Gordon, Head of Contemporary Factual at Woodcut Media (focusing on history and true crime, with shows including *Murdered at First Sight*, *Fatal Family Feuds*); Brian Woods, Executive Producer of *The Sixth Commandment* and co-founder of True Vision and Candour Productions; Lee McMurray, Commissioning Editor, Reality and Entertainment at Channel 4 (*Married at First Sight*, *Made in Chelsea*); Duane Dedman, Broadcast Regulatory Consultant at Reviewed & Cleared; and Mel Walden, freelance Casting and Welfare Executive.

McMurray began by defining what duty of care entails: "It's about looking after people, treating people as you would expect to be treated. It's about fairness, transparency and honesty. It's that simple, but the practice is quite complicated." Dedman put this, and Ofcom's new rules, in the context of the past five years, following the death in May 2019 of Steve Dymond, who failed a lie detector test on *The Jeremy Kyle Show*, and later died of an overdose.

Other tragedies, including the deaths of two former *Love Island* contestants, and its host Caroline Flack, pushed the DCMS and Ofcom to examine the challenges of protecting contributors. New rules came into effect in 2021.

He highlighted some of those rules: "Contributors must be made aware of what their contribution will be to a show, plus any risks that may arise from that. The broadcaster must attend to the welfare of particularly vulnerable contributors – those with learning difficulties, those who are sick, suffering from bereavement etc – and those not used to being in the public eye."



Wedding bells for Gemma and Matt in *Married at First Sight*

When duty calls

Guarding the welfare of programme contributors is growing ever more vital. Our expert panel spelt out the challenges

Dedman spoke of another new rule: preventing harm and offence to viewers at home, including witnessing bullying in a reality TV show. The new rules do not prohibit such events being shown, but they do require editorial context, such as a space for refutation, giving agency to everyone on screen.

Finally, he spoke of the differing levels of risk to contributors based on the content's format, highlighting shows where conflict is a major component and emotions run high, such as *Married at First Sight* and *Love Island*.

Walden, who has worked for the past

25 years on shows ranging from *Project Catwalk* to *The Intimacy Retreat* via *The Biggest Loser* and *Gordon Ramsay's Future Food Stars*, said that measuring and tailoring individual need was crucial. Her experience and long checklist of needs guide her, she said, in referring contributors for "psychological evaluations and clinical support throughout filming". Post-filming, "I provide a measured aftercare plan, up to and including the time of broadcast."

The audience watched an emotional clip from *Married at First Sight*, with one contestant, Bianca Petronzi, clearly

upset. McMurray, who commissioned the show for Channel 4, explained that while the broadcaster doesn't make the show, it remains fully involved in compliance issues. The clip was allowed to be screened, he said, because it adhered to duties of care. These, he agreed, have evolved in recent years: "We've had [welfare teams] in place ever since *Big Brother*, but the world has changed. Twitter didn't exist then. Trolling [on social media] is something you have to flag and highlight.

He added: "We shouldn't forget the benefits. For lots of contestants, this affords them opportunity, money, life experience, but we say, 'Let us talk you through the pitfalls'"

McMurray described what some call the "talk of doom" – or more plainly the "contributor experience chat" – that takes place ahead of filming. For his contestant Bianca, "It was series 3, and the benefits and risks of taking part were well known." During filming, "we have an embedded welfare team, and they are independent of editorial. They'll swoop in and look after Bianca."

Then, post-shoot, "our duty of care extends to transmission, for those watching at home. And beyond. We understand that taking part isn't the end of it. We will look after people for as long as they need it"

Gordon, whose company specialises in true crime, was keenly aware that many contributors had already "experienced life-changing events; they are automatically vulnerable and

Setting your moral compass

Tips for producers on how to create quality TV content while fulfilling their duty of care to contributors

Mel Walden Ask lots of questions before taking the job – what's the message, the content, the tone?

Duane Dedman Talk in a timely manner to your media lawyer or compliance person. Write notes so you can follow referrals. Comprehensive audits will prove due care has been taken.

Lee McMurray Make it your first concern – you've got to look after people. Don't be afraid to make big calls even if there's a cost involved. Don't think you know it all – you're always learning.

Brian Woods Be sure of your own moral compass and recruit the right people who share it.

Matt Gordon It comes down to empathy. Ask yourself: if that were me, would I be happy with the programme that was finally made?

distressed". For him, the creative process includes questioning the impact of making the programmes on the subjects: "Is it therapeutic or traumatic? Should this be told, and how? You have to make the decision on a case-by-case basis."

He has been instrumental in setting up the Association of True Crime Producers to promote best practice. He explained: "We go above and beyond Ofcom guidelines. We now have a common set of ethics. The guidelines

'CONTESTANTS GET MONEY, OPPORTUNITY, EXPERIENCE. BUT WE MUST EXPLAIN THE PITFALLS'

mean everyone can hold us to account. They are common sense. There's nothing groundbreaking, but we're saying, 'We will do this'."

Woods turned his documentary about the murder by Benjamin Field of Peter Farquhar and attempted murder of his neighbour, Ann Moore-Martin, into the RTS award-winning drama *The Sixth Commandment*, written by Sarah Phelps, and starring Timothy Spall and Anne Reid. He said that liaison with the families involved was crucial for both documentary and drama.

"Legally, you don't have to ask permission, [but] ethically you must have the family's support. We could only make this series with the support of Peter and Ann's families... We went to them and read the scripts to them from beginning to end."

Woods made the point that for *The Sixth Commandment*, the trailer has the words "Based on a true story..." but the series opens with the words "This is a true story... with some scenes created for dramatic purposes".

He said the BBC's compliance standards helped provide a framework for writer Phelps to create her dialogue. "They wanted Sarah to be able to source all the scenes. We'd been rigorous that everything was factual – we had a source and could back it up." ■

Report by Caroline Frost. The RTS National Event 'How To Do: Good Duty of Care' was held at the Cavendish Conference Centre, London, on 2 July, chaired by Nikki Bedi. The producers were Sally Quick and Deirdre Dowling.



The RTS panel in discussion

Paul Hampartsoumian

RTS NEWS

The RTS Technology Awards returned to the historic Wokefield Estate in Berkshire after a gap of five years with an expanded number of awards – eight in total – on offer to leading industry lights.

DTG Chief Executive Richard Lindsay-Davies was named Leader of the Year. “[He] has been at the forefront of many of the UK’s key television industry developments over a number of decades and is known for bringing together people, products and technology,” said the judges in their citation.

“It was an honour to welcome everyone back to this event, celebrating our ever-changing and expanding industry. The awards received an incredible response, with a record number of entries,” said RTS Technology Centre Chair Jennie Marwick-Evans, who hosted the ceremony in July.

The Society’s CEO, Theresa Wise, attended and, with RTS Technology Centre committee member Tony Orme, presented the awards.

Jigsaw24 Media Project Manager Sunita Ganger – “a dedicated and hard-working individual who has successfully led many technical projects” – took home the Unsung Hero award.

Techex Associate Engineer



The winners on the night

RTS Technology Centre

Tech talent recognised

Matthew Bell reports on the centre’s award ceremony in Berkshire, rewarding excellence in the technology sector

Tim Hudson was named Young Person of the Year, for his “strong technical capabilities, which directly impact broadcast output on both established and emerging areas of the industry”.

The Production Influencer category was won by MOOV Business Development Director Niki Whittle, the “stand-out nominee... with nearly two decades of visual

storytelling expertise, fostering and driving innovative graphics and studio solutions”.

ThinkAnalytics founder Peter Docherty was named Inspiring Technologist. The judges said: “The winner of this category stood out because they are remarkable both as a business leader and a truly inspiring and dedicated technology leader.”

The Sustainability Impact

prize went to asset management company CAMA, whose “real-world sustainability benefits... had the greatest breadth of impact across the industry”.

CJP Broadcast Solutions won the Company Social Responsibility category for its “commitment to helping disadvantaged young people both inside and outside the industry”.

The Anton/Bauer Salt-E Dog, a sodium battery for the TV and film industry that is cleaner than fossil fuel or lithium generators, was recognised in the Innovation Impact category. “The winner is a company whose innovation will have an impact far beyond just our industry,” said the judges. ■

The RTS Technology Awards were sponsored by CJP Broadcast Solutions, IBC, Interra, Manor Marketing, NXTGENbps, Pebble, Sky and The Chameleon Agency.



L to R: Theresa Wise, Young Person of the Year Tim Hudson and Tony Orme

RTS Technology Awards winners

- **Leader of the Year** - Richard Lindsay-Davies, DTG
- **Unsung Hero** - Sunita Ganger, Jigsaw24 Media
- **Young Person of the Year** - Tim Hudson, Techex
- **Production Influencer** - Niki Whittle, MOOV
- **Inspiring Technologist** - Peter Docherty, ThinkAnalytics
- **Sustainability Impact** - CAMA
- **Company Social Responsibility** - CJP Broadcast Solutions
- **Innovation Impact** - Anton/Bauer, Salt-E Dog

RTS Technology Centre

‘We’re bringing a scientific view of sharks to the world. They’re not villains – they’re just misunderstood.’ Executive Producer Drew Jones was discussing National Geographic’s innovative series *Shark Attack 360* at an RTS London online event in July.

The show uses 3D creation tool Unreal Engine to bring the presenter – marine biologist Dr Diva Amon – up close to virtual sharks so she can explain their behaviour and predatory characteristics.

Unreal Engine, which is used on games like *Fortnite* and increasingly in film and now television, seamlessly integrates live-action and computer-generated imagery in real time, while the programme is being filmed.

Pinpointing the show’s appeal, Jones said: “It’s rare to find people who aren’t curious about sharks.”

Episodes begin with a personal account of an incident involving a shark to “grab viewers’ attention”, and then use experts – including Amon who presents from a virtual shark lab – to explain why the shark attacked.

The shark lab had to be “dynamic, credible and immersive”, said Executive Producer Nick Metcalfe from Arrow Media, which makes *Shark Attack 360*. “We wanted seamless storytelling.

“Seeing a life-size virtual shark is stunning – you get an idea of the extraordinary size and power of these creatures. It makes for amazing TV.”

The shark lab was created at Collins Music Hall in Islington, north London – “an interesting physical space”, said Metcalfe. “Diva and the sharks could interact. She could move from one level to another and be beneath the sharks and above them.”



Shark Attack 360 presenter Dr Diva Amon

National Geographic

When sharks attack...

RTS London National Geographic fuses marine biology to new tech to bring sharks up close and personal. **Matthew Bell** reports

Amon had “dabbled in TV before”, but *Shark Attack 360* was on a different scale. “I’m a marine biologist, not an actor. This required me to get all of my very poor acting skills together. The space was empty [apart] from the crew,

sharks, to see the scale of them right next to me, to be able to open their mouths and look at the shape of their teeth, to go inside them and look at shark foetuses developing in the uterus – it was like the *CSI* of shark shows.”

and even with dinosaurs you have a lot of creative freedom. But with [sharks] you have to be very specific with their anatomy. Sharks move in a fluid, beautiful way – they’re graceful creatures. Previously, these kinds of effects were reserved for Hollywood budgets.”

TV technology is developing rapidly. This is the second iteration of *Shark Attack 360* and far in advance of the first. Metcalfe explained that, first time round, “we didn’t have the VFX played on a monitor and through the eye-piece of the cameras – we had yellow tennis balls on [sticks] and people had to imagine these were going to stand in for a shark”. ■

‘Dive into the future of TV: A behind-the-scenes look at Shark Attack 360’ streamed online on 22 July, and was chaired and produced by Terry Marsh.

‘SHARKS ARE NOT VILLAINS – THEY’RE JUST MISUNDERSTOOD’

and there weren’t any sharks.

“We had to envision these giant sharks and, thankfully, there was this technology that was able to help me do that. We had a mirror screen where I could see the [sharks’] placement and get the feel, but ultimately they weren’t there, so it took a lot of imagination and memory.”

She continued: “As a marine biologist, being able to have that access to these

Arrow worked closely with London visual effects (VFX) studio Little Shadow, whose Managing Director, Simon Percy, explained how his team made a virtual copy of the multi-storey physical space in Islington to allow them to plan the sequences in the shark lab.

Little Shadow Senior VFX Artist Lucas Zoltowski created the virtual sharks. He said: “Making aliens is fine,

Norwich Film People on brand

RTS East Brand campaigns were the theme of the most recent RTS East Norwich Film People event, held in July at Cinema City, Norwich.

Hosted by Charlie Gauvain, RTS East Vice-Chair and MD of Eye Film, the event drew a crowd of more than 100 film-makers and creatives who were walked through five brand films produced by local talent, ranging from a mini-documentary about a Norwich-based creative agency, to short films for Yamaha, to a promo for the Ian Fleming Foundation.

Each film-maker talked about making their film,



The Plant Messiah

Heist Films

discussing how they got the commission, working with the brand, the challenges they overcame and their film's reception.

Freelance director Pete Naylor presented a film in Finnish (with English subtitles)

and explained how to work in a language you don't speak; Justin Hunt, co-founder of advertising studio Heist, revealed how he successfully pitched an idea, *The Plant Messiah*, to Kew Gardens.

The film-makers formed a

panel, taking questions from the audience and covering topics that included the ethics of a project and how to bring creativity to brand films.

The next Norwich Film People event will be held in the autumn.

Sheppard wins RTS tech prize

RTS Awards Self-taught web developer Benjamin Sheppard has been named RTS Young Technologist of the Year. Sheppard – who works for the BBC and specialises in broadcast graphics – has been creating websites, web tools and digital services since the age of 12.

He started at the BBC in 2022 and his work has been used as the basis for innovative graphics on many sports programmes.

Sheppard said: "It is an honour and a privilege to win such a prestigious award. I would like to say a big thank you to my mentor at the BBC, Ryan McKenna.

"I look forward to continuing my work with complex web-based broadcast



RTS Young Technologist of the Year: Benjamin Sheppard

graphics and implementing new processes to help the industry to progress."

As his prize, Sheppard wins an all-expenses-paid trip to the International Broadcasting Convention (IBC 2024) in



Coffey Award winner: Connor Webster

Amsterdam this month. The runner-up and recipient of the Coffey Award for Excellence in Technology is Connor Webster, Lead Software Engineer at YouView.

Terry Marsh, Chair of the

RTS Young Technologist of the Year Award Jury, said: "Benjamin is a highly impressive and inspiring young talent who, in just two years, has profoundly impacted the offering of one of the country's leading broadcasters, the BBC.

"Both Benjamin and Connor have demonstrated remarkable technical skills and deep-rooted ambition, which I'm sure will see them flourish and have long, successful careers in our industry."

The RTS Young Technologist of the Year Award was established by the Royal Television Society with funds from the family of the distinguished engineer AM Beresford-Cooke.

Matthew Bell

Most people's knowledge of talent agencies probably starts and ends with Netflix's French comedy-drama *Call My Agent!*. Fortunately, a summer Futures event offered a glimpse into this mysterious world with the help of three experts from the world-renowned Curtis Brown agency.

"My role is to be the best advocate for my clients," said literary agent Jess Molloy.

Her colleague, Cynthia Okoye, represents screenwriters and directors from shows such as *One Day*, *Succession* and *Peaky Blinders*. "Ultimately, on a very basic level, we are getting clients work," she explained.

Lara Beach from Curtis Brown's actors department discussed the qualities an agent needs. Much of her work, she said, involves "persuasion and negotiation", for which you need to develop an "acute awareness" of how people work.

Molloy added: "You can't go in all guns blazing. [The job] is all about connections and contacts... you need people to want to work with you again. You have to be strong and confident, but also pleasant and charming."

Okoye used hit Channel 4 sitcom *Big Boys*, created and written by Jack Rooke, a Curtis Brown client, to illustrate how a TV show can make it from



Big Boys

Channel 4

Quick, call my agent!

idea to screen with the help of agents. "*Big Boys* started life as an acclaimed Edinburgh show," she recalled.

"It had some real high and low moments; it was turned down initially by the BBC, which I am sure they are regretting, before finally getting sold to Channel 4."

Molloy worked with the team behind RTS multi-award-winning BBC mockumentary *People Just Do Nothing*, which started on YouTube. It ran for five series and spawned a film, *People Just Do Nothing: Big in Japan*, a live

music project, Kurupt FM, and book and podcast spin-offs. "It's been an amazing grass-roots success," she said.

Curtis Brown offers internships and these give newcomers a leg-up, said Molloy, at a time when "it's really hard to get your foot in the door". The best way to get started, she said, was to take "opportunities that give you on-the-ground training", the chance to make an impression and build up good contacts. "We are a contacts business and always so busy and overstretched, so when

you find someone reliable, quick and efficient, we're like 'I can't let you go'. You have to want to consume everything; there is so much reading, so much to watch.... Show interest and talk passionately."

"Please apply," said Okoye. "It seems like a closed-off industry but we're always hungry for talented applicants." **Matthew Bell**

The 10 July RTS Futures event was hosted by Joanna Reesby, a partner at Elevate Talent, and produced by Curtis Brown and Elevate Talent.

Dog Academy trains new television talent

With much of the TV industry in the economic doldrums, the centre held an event in July to support the region's freelance community.

The Bristol session featured a talk from junior casting and

location researcher Jacob Lloyd and runner/production secretary Frankie Forsyth from Channel 4 series *The Dog Academy*, which is made by Five Mile Films.

The duo explained their roles and identified key

attributes. Lloyd cited "being personable", while Forsyth said "versatility" was needed to ensure shows ran smoothly.

Days are varied, they said, involving anything from looking after (misbehaving) dogs, to dabbling in camera work, to supporting contributors. Good communication on a large set of 60 was vital to the production's success.

Both shared tips on how to stay connected and motivated when work is quiet. Forsyth tries to maintain a

structure to her day when out of work, while Lloyd supplements his income by taking hospitality jobs between TV contracts. Keeping in contact with friends in the TV industry was a lifeline as "they are going through the same thing and understand".

Career highlights included the location month on *The Dog Academy*, and the creative buzz and satisfaction of working in a team to deliver a new format and successful show. **Suzy Lambert**

The UPSIDE

We'll always have Paris...

Paris 2024 will go down in history as one of the greatest Olympics. The City of Light has never shone as brightly as in those 19 days of breathtaking athletic achievement. After the Covid-hit Tokyo games saw athletes competing in empty arenas, Paris had non-stop entertainment with 32 new world records set.

Our broadcasters and streamers rose to the occasion, and viewers responded in their millions. Across Europe, Warner Bros. Discovery reached more than 215 million viewers over its linear and digital platforms. JB Perrette, the company's CEO and President, Global Streaming and Games, said: "Paris

exceeded all expectations. We added millions of paying subscribers, and engaged millions of viewers daily on streaming who have watched billions of minutes of content."

Gold medals to the champion pundits

The live Olympics round-up *Bonsoir Paris*, fronted by the sparkling Laura Woods and hosted from an eye-catching rooftop set in full view of the Eiffel Tower, was a highlight of Eurosport's daily line-up. Iwan Thomas's inside track on the athletics was huge fun.

Meanwhile, the BBC, despite restrictions on what it could show, dominated linear audiences. Mark Foster and Rebecca Adlington were superb as swimming pundits, and Keely Hodgkinson's stunning gold medal-run in the 800 metres delivered a huge audience of 9.1 million across BBC One and iPlayer. Overall, 36.1 million viewers saw 15

minutes or more of Paris 2024 on BBC TV channels, well over half the UK population.

A big + for football

Staying with sport, as the football season gathers pace, we welcome the arrival of Sky Sports+ and its massive TV boost to the EFL. Those of us who support Championship, League One and League Two clubs can now look forward to a lot more televised matches. Bring it on.

Things can only get better for streamers

We may have passed peak TV, but the new Labour government can find optimism for its growth strategy in a report from PwC. Its Global Entertainment & Media Outlook forecasts that streaming services and the cinema sector are poised to propel the UK entertainment and media market into Europe's largest

by 2025, overtaking Germany. PwC predicts that UK entertainment and media advertising revenues will grow to £121bn by 2028. For the record, the UK streaming market is the largest in western Europe and third biggest globally.

I spy ... grubby Gary and his ace spoons

Talking of streamers, the Upside can't wait to savour season four of Apple TV+'s flagship British drama *Slow Horses*, adapted from Mick Herron's *Spook Street*. The latest in TV's most compelling spy saga will be screened in weekly episodes beginning early this month and reaching the finale on 9 October.

Expect more thrilling set-pieces and questionable hygiene involving Slough House's finest, and peerless acting from a brilliant cast led by Gary Oldman and Kristin Scott Thomas. ■



The Steve Hewlett Memorial Lecture

With Joan Bakewell

3 October 2024



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▶ The Next Episode

Keeping our creative edge.

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The RTS London Convention is accredited by the CPD Standards Office, giving delegates the opportunity to formally recognise what they have learnt.



NETFLIX

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