

ariel

AFTER THE AMBUSH - REPORTER GETS
FIRST INTERVIEW WITH ADEBAYOR

Pages 4

FREEZE FRAME

◆ **BBC SCOTLAND REPORTER** Julie Peacock and cameraman Brian Ashman at the Cairngorm ski centre. Snow sports enthusiasts were in heaven, but the extreme cold caused technical problems for the reporting team. Apart from keeping themselves warm in temperatures as low as -30C, batteries lost power in minutes, tapes froze and snapped, and the fine, powdery snow got into equipment.



Snow Patrol

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COLIN ANDERSON, comedy producer on a Stepping Stone attachment to San Francisco

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◆ **A WEEK OF RECORD SNOWFALLS** and record temperatures produced record audiences for BBC programmes, as the British lived up to their reputation of being obsessed with the weather.

Around the UK news crews have been out in freezing temperatures and falling snow, reporting on school closures, transport problems, cut-off communities, and the stoical responses of the general public. From local radio to BBC One special programmes the information flow is non-stop, relaying the latest weather forecasts, travel news and school closures, as well as showing the situation from top to bottom of the UK as the bad weather continues.

Staff made heroic efforts to continue working. Snowed in BBC Scotland **SBJ CAMERON BUTTLE** set up a radio sat phone in his garden and reported live for Radio Scotland, 5 live and the News Channel. Then he made a short film of life in his Borders village, where two foot of snow had fallen, which ran on *Reporting Scotland* and the News Channel. Meanwhile Borders police came to the aid of **BJ ANGELA SOAVE**, ferrying her along miles of blocked roads to Selkirk. She



Multi-media journalist Cameron Buttle

It was a massive, expensive effort, with two satellite trucks being brought in, and extra flying time for the news helicopter. BBC One contributed towards the costs.

Kevin Bakhurst said: 'It stretches us quite a lot to do specials, because of the lower numbers of people in the newsroom [following cuts in BBC News in the last three years]. But the audience response has been remarkable.'

So rosters were juggled, people came in from days off, and the production team for each special was just five, headed by assistant editor **GWENNAN ROBERTS**.

The efforts to reach the story, and report it fully, were rewarded with record viewing figures. On January 5 and 6 the *Six O'Clock News* had audiences of 6.5 and 6.9 million respectively, with the *Ten* drawing 6.95m and 5.8m.



Weatherman Paul Hudson, live at Stamford Bridge

THE BIG FREEZE NEWS SPECIAL on BBC One on January 6 was watched by almost six million people and, on the same day, the News Channel achieved some of its highest audiences in recent years, reaching half a million on occasions.

There were also record figures for the 1830 regional bulletin. More than 10 million people across the country watched their local shows.

The 18.30 edition of **REPORTING SCOTLAND** on January 5 had an audience of almost a million, the largest for almost ten years, while **WALES TODAY** achieved its highest early evening figure this century, possibly its largest ever, with 571,000 people watching. Figures for radio audiences are not yet available.

DEPUTY DG MARK BYFORD paid tribute to all staff for their efforts. He told Ariel: 'The key thing I want to say is 'Thanks'. He went on: 'We know how big moments bring audiences together, and the weather comes straight into that; they want to see it, hear about it and they want all the information we can give them. What shines through is the on the ground reportage, the King ideal of reporting all aspects of the UK.' You can see more photos of BBC staff at work in the snow at Ariel Online



Dominic King, with canine assistants

then single-handedly broadcast an hour long special on the weather. BBC Scotland's head of news **ATHOLL DUNCAN** commended their efforts. He said: 'I take my hat off to them, and all the rest of the BBC news teams who braved the cold.'

At the opposite end of the country Radio Kent's Drivetime programme came from presenter **DOMINICKING'S** house on January 7, after heavy snow made his journey to work impossible.

KEVIN BAKHURST, controller of the News Channel, oversaw two news specials for BBC One on January 6. The logistics were immense. News-gathering deployed eight satellite trucks and two VSats to be live from *Breakfast* onwards and during the course of the day a total of 14 trucks were out providing pictures, as well as three VSats and roving crews.

News organiser **ALAN REED** co-ordinated the coverage, and said nations and regions staff made everything possible, with some crews staying overnight on location to ensure the output.



Broadcasting from the A3 at Petersfield

FROST BITES

MANCHESTER BASED SBCJ Rob Wood provided lives into the News Channel from a Kwik Fit in Stockport – while the VSat van was having a puncture fixed. Not content with that demonstration of technical versatility, the following day he took the side of the camera off, moments before a live on the *One*, to remove snow that had got into the mechanism while filming on Saddleworth Moor.

BBC NORTH East reporter Chris Jackson blogged and broadcast on his three day attempt to get to Nice for an *Inside Out* film. After snow closed Liverpool airport he and his producer tried different routes, but cancelled flights, trains and buses thwarted them at every turn. You can follow the marathon journey at bbc.co.uk/blogs/chrisjackson/

NEIL PRINGLE, BBC Sussex breakfast presenter, slept on the office floor on Tuesday evening to be sure the show went on. He had to lie on jiffy bags after problems with his airbed, and finished the week by inaugurating the station's SlipSlide group after falling over and banging his head in the carpark.

BBC BERKSHIRE presenter Susanne Courtney walked four miles through the snow to get to work, and as she was trudging up a hill in her wellies, the station's assistant editor Duncan McLarty ran past her. He jogged ten miles between his home and the office.

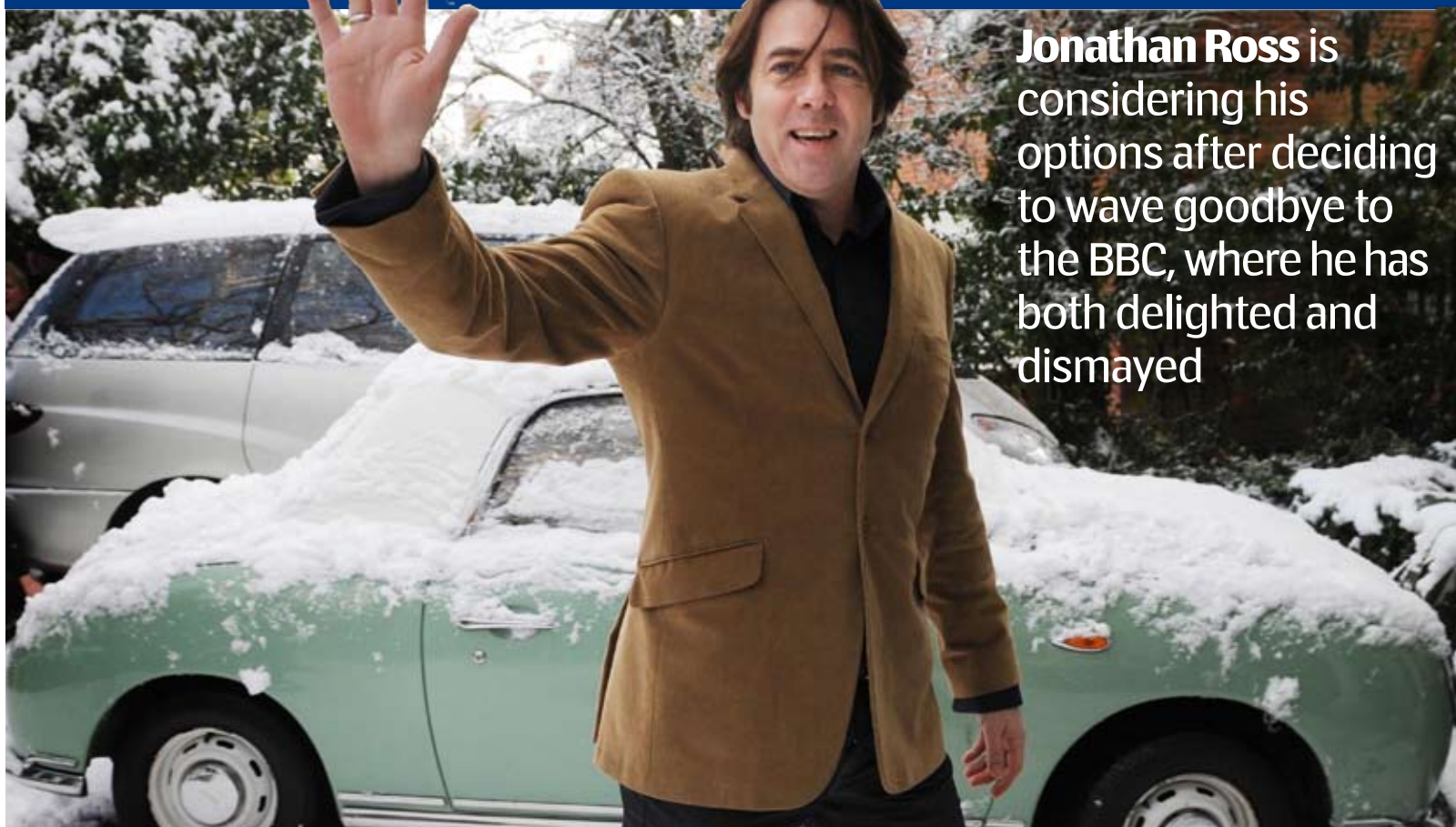
GNS PRODUCER Alex Grundon decided to come in early after hearing the weather forecasts. Instead of starting his shift at 0530 he began at midnight, working through the night to ensure local radio stations would have plenty of material, even if they had fewer staff than usual.

NIGEL MARGERISON, World Service night editor, was on a train which ground to a halt when power lines came down. Passengers were led up the track to safety at Hackney Downs. Deputy night editor Steve Jackson couldn't get from Oxford to his shift at Bush House. He went to Radio Oxford and did the job from there.

THE SNOW threatened Radio Solent's exclusive plans for a live audience grilling of Gordon Brown, until the station landed the first live interview with the PM following Wednesday's shock leadership challenge. Solent's scheduled Question Time-style audience event in Portsmouth had to be abandoned, but Brown talked live from Downing Street to presenter Julian Clegg – before taking questions from listeners.

A QUESTION OF SPORT GAME

If you tried to enter last week's QoS competition and failed, apologies – we published an incorrect URL. If you want to create a game for the show, please email Ariel Competitions.



PHOTOGRAPH: PA PHOTOS

Jonathan Ross is considering his options after deciding to wave goodbye to the BBC, where he has both delighted and dismayed

I LOVE MAKING THE SHOWS

IN A STATEMENT JONATHAN ROSS SAID:

'I signed my current contract with the BBC having turned down more lucrative offers from other channels because it was where I wanted to be and – as I have said before – would happily have stayed there for any fee they cared to offer, but there were other considerations.'

I love making my Friday night talk show, my Saturday morning radio show and the Film Programme, and will miss them all. I look forward to continuing work on these shows until the summer, and I will continue hosting the Bafta Film Awards, Comic Relief and other BBC specials.

While at the BBC I have worked with some of the nicest and most talented people in the industry and had the opportunity to interview some of the biggest stars in the world. I am grateful to the BBC for such a marvellous experience.'

AND THIS IS WHAT THE PAPERS SAID

The prudes get what they wanted and Auntie loses a terrific talent
The Evening Standard

Good widdance
The Daily Telegraph

Wickedly mischievous, flawlessly slick – in short he's a huge loss
The Independent

Talented, yes – but he threw it all away
Daily Mail

The loss of Ross will backfire on the BBC
The Observer



Where now for motormouth?

by Sally Hillier

Timing is everything and Jonathan Ross's admission that 'it's not a bad time for me to move on and possibly not a bad time for them [the BBC] either' says it all.

This could be a challenging year for the beleaguered BBC and some of the heat is now off, thanks to Ross's snowy day news that he will step down when his contract ends in July – 18 months after 'Sachsgate'.

Who shot JR (in the foot)? JR did, with that call to Andrew Sachs.

With his 'edgy' brand of entertainment and reported £6m a year pay deal (although it's not clear how much goes to his production company and how much to him personally), Ross had become a symbol of excess and the stick with which to beat his employer. On *Question Time* columnist Polly Toynbee described his salary as a PR 'catastrophe'.

Even so, the decision to quit was the star's alone, insists creative director Alan Yentob. 'He'd had a tough year...and I think he thought,

I need a rest, I don't want to proceed. He has clearly enjoyed the work he has done at the BBC, but some of his reasons are private.'

At the weekend it was reported that Ross's wife Jane, tired of all the attacks over pay, had urged him to quit.

So what now for the presenter who in 2005 – the same year he received the OBE – was voted the most powerful man in broadcasting. A complete break and more time with the family perhaps?

There is speculation that he is keen to forge a career in the US, while closer to home it is suggested that both Sky and Channel 4 are interested in signing him up.

The BBC meanwhile finds itself with three gaps to fill: Friday night on BBC One, Saturday morning on Radio 2 and *Film 2010*.

Graham Norton, Michael McIntyre and even Russell Brand (surely not) have been touted as replacement Friday night hosts, but Yentob says no decisions have been taken yet.

'All the stories about Graham

Norton are nonsense,' he adds.

Mark Lamarr appears to be a possibility for the Radio 2 show and Mark Kermode is the name in the frame for *Film 2010*: 'You know your stuff, make good telly and interact with the punters,' one admirer has posted to Kermode's website, while another comments: 'One always ends up waiting for [Ross] to drop a double-entendre bomb.'

Well, that's his schtick. And it is loved by millions of fans, many of whom besieged the internet last week with messages of support.

Editorial disaster

But while many delight in his flirty, dirty line of chat, others were appalled when, for example, he told Gwyneth Paltrow she was 'gagging for it'; asked Michael Aspel if he had 'fxxed' a beauty contestant, and David Cameron whether he had ever masturbated while thinking of Margaret Thatcher.

As fellow broadcaster Mark Lawson observed in the *Guardian*: '... there was always some question

over how long the scary, swearsy approach could last.'

It was a question that loomed ever larger following Sachsgate, as a result of which Ross was suspended, Russell Brand quit and Radio 2 controller Lesley Douglas resigned. To try to prevent a similar editorial disaster – the lewd call to Sachs was made during Brand's radio show, produced by his own company – the BBC brought in new compliance measures and it is these, many believe, that have turned Ross into a shadow of his former self.

But not that much of a shadow because even with new compliance rules, and a requirement that he record his Radio 2 show, he still upset some people with this 'advice' to parents: 'If your son asks for a Hannah Montana MP3 player, you might want to think about putting him down for adoption before he brings his...erm... partner home.'

Which brings us to Four Poofs and a Piano. What will happen to them after July? They're open to offers – just like Ross.

MIXED REACTION: WE ASKED STAFF FOR THEIR VIEWS AND THIS IS WHAT YOU TOLD US

I would imagine that Jonathan Ross is tired of being at the centre of a 'compliance storm', one that will/has inevitably toned down his particular brand (no pun intended) of comedy. I remember the first time I ever walked around TVC and saw his picture on the wall. He looked right at home as a part of this institution and I, for one, will miss him.

Tim Johns
station sound producer,
BBC Lincolnshire

I look forward to seeing him do something different in the future. Good luck to him.

Simon Kay
business accountant, Cardiff

Mixed feelings. Sad to see him go but the shows have lost something since his return. It is interesting to see that his would be successors have all toned down their act (which is what got them on the BBC in the first place) as the big prize looms in front of them. Perhaps there are signs in in-

visible ink on all BBC studio doors saying 'Edginess no longer welcome here'.

Greg Kerchhoff
project manger,
Broadcast Centre

As someone who has spent almost all my career in BBC News, I took exception to Ross's boast that he was worth 1000 journalists – in truth, he wasn't worth 1000th of any of my colleagues.

As a disabled person, I took exception to his gratuitous

insulting of disabled people, disguised as humour. I might be tempted to hold the door for him on his way out, but I might also be tempted to let it go when he was halfway through.

Geoff Adams-Spink
chairman of the Disabled
Staff Forum, White City

Jonathan Ross is a highly entertaining broadcaster but not worth the fee he was reportedly being paid....

His leaving has highlight-

ed, along with other recent events, a lack of conviction among senior management... their mute response to Ross's departure reveals a lack of confidence which doesn't bode well for the future. Why couldn't they say 'so long, thanks for all the good times, but it's time to go'?

Daniel Edwards
assistant producer, CBBC
interactive development

I wouldn't be surprised if he'd been pushed, given the BBC's

shoddy handling of the Sachs affair, which the corporation has allowed to define Ross.
Russell Newlove
studio manager, Bush House

I for one am glad he is going. Yes, he is good at what he does but his pay far outweighs his talent, and there are many talented people in the BBC. Maybe we could all now have a decent pay rise with the money the Beeb will be saving.

Pat Noel
receptionist, BBC Oxford

Robinson exclusive was BBC NI's best kept secret

by Cathy Loughran

The story that broke like a storm over Northern Irish politics last week was the result of a months long inquiry which, even by the investigative standards of the respected *Spotlight* team, was a remarkably well kept secret.

The astonishing allegations in Thursday's *Spotlight* programme about MP Iris Robinson's financial dealings and her affair with 19 year old Kirk McCambley caused an unprecedented scandal at Stormont.

On Monday, her husband Peter Robinson temporarily stepped aside as first minister and requested a parliamentary and assembly investigation into his own conduct.

For Monday night's *Panorama*, *The MP and the Whistleblower*, the BBC Northern Ireland tv current affairs team updated the documentary, adding context for a UK-wide audience and repeating the allegations, which Pe-

ter Robinson has denied, that he failed to tell the authorities about the £50,000 his wife obtained from developers to set her young lover up in business. Robinson himself has called the allegations 'unfounded and mischievous' saying he acted 'ethically and properly' throughout.

The claims about controversial assembly member Iris Robinson that were at the heart of Thursday's documentary on BBC One Northern Ireland were made by her former advisor-turned-whistleblower Selwyn Black. In a series of televised interviews on Wednesday, Peter Robinson revealed that his wife had attempted suicide on the night last March after he learned of her affair. She is now leaving politics and is receiving acute psychiatric treatment.

The team behind both pro-

grammes – BBC NI's head of tv current affairs Jeremy Adams, reporter Darragh McIntyre and producer Mary McKeagney – had always intended the Robinson investigation to work for both Northern Ireland audiences and network, as one of 12 *Pan-*



orama films now made annually in Belfast.

'It was carried out in conditions of great secrecy and only a very few people were ever aware,' says *Panorama* editor Sandy Smith. 'Out of 12 films, we knew one would be a revered *Spotlight*, but we never

envisaged it would be such a big exclusive.'

Other recent *Panoramas* from current affairs in Belfast have included *What Happened to Baby P?*, nominated for an RTS journalism award, and *Slumdogs and Millionaires*, about migrant labour in Dubai – reflecting the team's strength in investigative filmmaking.

Since the strengthening of BBC NI as a centre of excellence for tv current affairs – and the increase in *Panorama* output planned as part of the network supply strategy – only a handful of films have centred on Northern Ireland affairs, including *Return of the Gunman* about the Real IRA, also by Darragh McIntyre, brother of Donal.

'Two of *Panorama*'s best young filmmakers, James Oliver and Katy Stead, have taken on full producing roles in Northern Ireland and the intention is very much to develop local talent there too,' Smith says.

WS captures two faces of Africa

Director of World Service, Peter Horrocks, was in Africa in the build up to the Cup of Nations

World Service sports journalist Farayi Mungazi was live on air, announcing the winner of the BBC African footballer of the year competition. But as he revealed the fans had chosen Didier Drogba, a darker side of the continent struck. While a package on Drogba played out, Farayi learnt from an interviewee that the Togo team had been ambushed in Angola. The production team checked the tip, Farayi broke the news and African football's dreams were turned upside down.

As the news rippled out, the World Service's consistent commitment to football in Africa paid off. Not only do we have a team deployed in Luanda but Matthew Kenyon was in the Angolan enclave of Cabinda where the Togo team came under fire. (See his story below)

Two Togolese officials and the bus driver were killed in the attack. Several other people were injured. The Togo team has withdrawn from the tournament.

The violence has cast a shadow over Angola's attempts to show a new face to the world. Being here I've been impressed by how far the country has moved on since the main civil war, although much remains to be done.

In a week travelling in Africa I have seen how football brings Africa together – in triumph and in sadness. It's a story that is riveting and is followed endlessly by the BBC's largest audience in the world – its African audience. The BBC World Service will continue to back that commitment to Africa and will make sure that it's on hand to tell the story close up, better than anyone else in the world.

Fear and forgiveness reach across the Guantanamo divide

Several months ago, ex Guantanamo Bay guard Brandon Neely decided to get in touch with a former prisoner, via Facebook. His message eventually led to a face to face meeting in the UK with two of the Tipton Three. BBC reporter Gavin Lee was also at the extraordinary reunion...



Tension broken: Gavin Lee (right), with former prisoners and guard

As Brandon Neely nervously enters the room, he comes face to face with two British Asian men who look equally awkward. 'Hi, I'm Brandon.' 'You look different without your cap,' Ruhul Ahmed says quietly.

Brandon points out that they too look different, since he last saw them wearing prison jumpsuits. There is nervous laughter, reflecting the fact that the three men were last together in vastly different circumstances at the world's most notorious prison, Guantanamo Bay. Then, Shafiq Rasul and Ruhul Ahmed were terrorist suspects branded the worst of the worst, and

Brandon Neely was their jailer.

The journey of reconciliation started almost a year earlier in Texas. Brandon, who left the military in 2004 to become a Houston police officer, was struggling to come to terms with his time in Guantanamo and had become increasingly dubious about the legitimacy of Shafiq and Ruhul's imprisonment in Cuba. As a guard, he had come to know Shafiq, and bonded with Ruhul in chats about rap music and women.

In 2004 both Rasul and Ahmed were cleared and released from Guantanamo. Last year Brandon decided to ex-

press his regret in a novel way. He contacted Shafiq on Facebook. At this point the BBC became involved. I had been talking to the so-called 'Tipton Taliban' and I proposed a face-to-face meeting between Brandon, Shafiq and Ruhul. They all agreed.

Brandon arrived at Heathrow ashen-faced and reluctant to say much before the meeting. Nerves had set in. Shafiq and the normally gregarious Ruhul were notably quiet as they sat in front of tv cameras waiting for Brandon to enter the room. No-one knew what to expect, and the atmosphere was

tense. After an initially awkward introduction, the conversation turned to the reason for the visit. Brandon wanted to express how complicit he felt in their detention, and acknowledge the wrong they were subjected to.

Shafiq and Ruhul were asked to explain their reasons for being in Afghanistan, which had resulted in their capture. Brandon told them he thought it was a case of 'wrong place, wrong time'.

Both sides were beginning to bond, until Brandon revealed something that threatened to derail the whole process. He told them that he had 'slammed' an elderly detainee's head against the floor when the man refused to comply with an order. Ruhul was speechless, then evidently struggled as he considered whether he could forgive Brandon. He chose forgiveness. A poignant moment.

All three felt they'd found a form of closure from meeting. All left with resolve, one with a degree of absolution.

Their story will be featured across 16 BBC outlets, including *Newsnight* on Tuesday, January 12 and in *Guantanamo Reunited* on Radio 5 live on Thursday, January 14 at 10pm.

That interview with Adebayor



Matthew Kenyon (left), a sports producer with the African service, spent most of Friday at the airport in the Cabinda province of Angola, reporting the arrival of competitors in the Africa Cup of Nations, and had just got back to his hotel when he

heard about the attack on Togo's football team. He made his way to the players' village where he was told that the squad was at a nearby hospital.

'I headed to the hospital and, as luck would have it, saw the Togo squad walking back towards the players' village,' he told Ariel.

He introduced himself and in turn was introduced to Emmanuel Adebayor, who was on board the bus when it came under fire.

Although shocked and upset, the Manchester City star was happy to talk to Kenyon, giving interviews in English and French, which were immediately filed back to London for use on a range of outlets including the World Service, Radio 5 live and the News Channel.

'I've been caught up in news stories before while covering sports events but nothing of this magnitude,' said Kenyon.

ALL HE NEEDS IS LOVE

Clare Bolt meets Chris Evans – the Wogan successor who is happy to wake up with anyone who cares to listen to him

HE OPENED WITH THE BEATLES and self effacingly turned the spotlight onto Moira Stuart, celebrating her return to the BBC with three cheers. 'You are too good to me,' intoned the news-reader silkily, with just a hint of irony.

When we meet at Western House in the week before transmission, Evans is pink cheeked beneath an unseasonal Santa hat. He's not been home for three days, because the snow meant he couldn't guarantee getting in for the 7am show run-through, and is missing his wife and 11 month son, Noah. The rehearsals have paid off though. 'We're good to go,' he tweets on Friday. 'Moira's the nuts.'

On the cusp of taking over what he's called 'the biggest job in radio' he is composed. Focused. Unflappable. While he's heaped praise on his predecessor, his show, he says, will be 'entirely different. Completely different. Haven't held back at all. It's not a soft sell'.

What's clear is that nothing has been left to chance. Each link (including Stuart's) has been crafted, features road tested and the playlist fine tuned with help from his existing Drivetime listeners. 'Once the mechanics are in place, it gets funnier,' he reasons. 'It's like actors on stage – you need to know where you're standing first.'

The supporting cast is also in place. Stuart is 'amazing,' he promises. 'She's as good as on tv, but even more authoritative. She comes in and we all go, waaaay!' With traffic's Lynn Bowles and sports presenter Jonny Saunders

on board, the show feels balanced and grown-up – it bounces along nicely without the anything-can-happen vertiginous quality of his Radio 1 breakfast show.

It's also underpinned by a simple ethos: 'The more organised you are, the more effortless it will seem,' he says. 'The more prepared you are, the more relaxed you'll be and the better you can communicate.'

Wogan, he reasons, was funny because – after 27 years on the show – he was so relaxed.

He wants to achieve that kind of levity. 'His show was very simple, it wasn't pressure driven. I've tried to take the pressure out so that I can have fun.'

And that, he argues, is what the audience want: good music and fun. For his part, he's said before that it is the 'grammar' of radio which really counts and that 'personality' is only the wallpaper surrounding a live show. But, as his blog testifies, he has a knack of connecting with people. Controller Bob Shennan has already speculated that he will bring 'a very large army of fans' to the breakfast show.

Evans shakes off any suggestion that this army will follow the breakfast show and become his very own, er, 'Eggs' (Evans's guys and gals). His show, he says, will embrace '100 percent of listeners all the time'.

'It's not a club for anyone,' he says forcefully. 'I don't want any link, any record, to be exclusive.' When he pictures his audience, he pictures the kids he knows, the grandparents he knows. As he points out, he's not trying to appeal to women or white van drivers or football fans. Radio 2 gets everyone at breakfast.

Was he mindful of the Togs when he was planning the show? 'I'm not mindful of a particular demographic,' he says, with a touch of defiance. 'To compartmentalise is to marginalise – it's dangerous.'

He's also playing to his strengths – including a knack for coming up with original ideas and formats (his producer Helen Thomas says his team are 'constantly striving to match the levels of audacity and creativity'). Music-wise, there's the Jukebox Jury where listeners judge new releases, and Moira's Golden Oldies, which should appeal to the heartland listeners.

Will he change the show if listening figures dip? He bristles. 'I won't change anything because of what other people say. I might change it because of what I think, but we do this job for a living and we should know better than anyone what works. Sure, there will be criticism – I've had criticism for everything I've done.'

'I won't change anything because of what people say'



Can an ad man write a comedy? Adam Bambury might just be persuaded...

How (not) to get ahead in advertising

'THERE ARE A LOT of unhappy people in advertising,' states Jonathan Thake, writer of new ad-agency sitcom *The Persuasionists*. 'So it's a rich area to write about.' He should know – he was in the industry for years, working for the likes of Pot Noodle and creating one of the most complained about ads ever in the brand's short-lived 'slag of all snacks' campaign.

It was this disillusionment with a profession he fell into as a way of paying the bills that spurred Thake to create his sitcom. 'Beyond a certain age you think, this isn't the way I had my life planned out...going into meetings, being shouted at by the marketing manager of McCain's oven chips...'

It was, he reasoned, time to stop going to the pub, sit down, and try to write a script.

Iain Morris, an exec from indie Bwark, liked the result so much he bought it and took it to BBC exec Simon Wilson. A single camera pilot, then known as *The Scum also Rises*, was made for BBC Three – with disappointing results.

'It wasn't that successful creatively, but we still believed in the writing,' remembers Wilson. 'So we reconfigured and re-piloted it for BBC Two, but this time in front of a studio audience, which is quite a radical shift.'

With extra gags ('you want to make sure the people in the audience are laughing,' asserts Wilson) and a multi-cam-

era set up, *The Persuasionists* was green lit. Six episodes were filmed with a comedic cast that includes Iain Lee in his first acting role, stand-up comedian Jarred Christmas, and 6 Music's Adam Buxton, who plays hapless account executive and central protagonist, Greg.

While the world of advertising, which offers such rich dramatic material in *Mad Men*, is surely ripe for parody, don't expect a caustic satire in the manner of Nathan Barley's assault on hip new-media types. More akin to *The IT Crowd* in its execution, it finds room for everything from cerebral humour to crude gross-out gags in its surreal world.

Thake finished his first script just before the Channel 4 series began: 'I saw an interview with [writer] Graham Lineham about a new show set in an office that was going to be a studio sitcom with lots of gag lines. I thought – shit, that was all the things that I was hoping to do,' he remembers.

Thake finally quit adland in early 2009, when *The Persuasionists* went into production. Is he glad to have left? 'Yeah, I am,' he says, crying mock tears of relief. 'But I would never slag it off. If it all goes wrong I'll shuffle back in and start doing ads for washing powder again and pretend it didn't happen. Maybe I could get my old desk back...'

The Persuasionists, BBC Two, January 13



Acting up: Iain Lee plays Billy

Laura Timmins (Olivia Hallinan) enjoys some rare dry weather on the West Country shoot for the third series of the costume drama



Made it through the rain

IF ANYONE NEEDED a barbecue summer last year it was the team behind *Lark Rise to Candleford*.

With 50 percent of the period drama filmed outside, the cast and production staff would have welcomed some decent weather during their six months on location in the West Country. It didn't happen. 'We started filming on June 1 and had only about a week of sunshine throughout the summer,' recalls producer Annie Tricklebank.

Things didn't get much better in the autumn and early winter when persistent rain upset the shooting schedule. Not that viewers will have noticed the unhelpful conditions in this third series. Tricks of the trade, such as grading (adjusting the colour of camera shots), give a largely blue and dreamy hue to the skies even when it is bucketing down, as happened during the filming of harvest.

While the interior scenes are filmed inside a warehouse complex in Yate, just outside Bristol, those all-important exteriors are shot on two dedicated sets in the countryside around Bath.

The area's famous Cotswold stone is similar in colour and style to the buildings in rural Oxfordshire, where writer Flora Thompson spent her childhood at the end of the 19th century, inspiring her *Lark Rise* to

The blue skies and gentle pace of *Lark Rise* belie some bad weather and fast work on set, as **Sally Hillier** writes



Outdoor pursuits: Rufus Andrews and Annie Tricklebank

Candleford memoir. It has been adapted for television by Bill Gallagher, who chronicles the lives of farm workers, crafts people and gentry through a range of colourful characters.

The set for the hamlet of *Lark Rise* has been constructed on a genuine working farm while that for the neighbouring market town of *Candleford* is on a private estate a 30 minute drive away.

'Building the sets for the first series was a huge job that took months,' says location manager Rufus Andrews. 'Even with those in place, we need other outdoor locations for some of the stories and it can be a struggle to find places without modern features such

as cables, pylons and airfields.'

The first series, starring Dawn French and Julia Sawalha, proved a hit, regularly attracting more than six million viewers. French left halfway through the second series, due to other commitments, but the show has held its appeal.

'People love it,' says Annie Tricklebank. 'Whatever their age, they know they can watch without fear of being offended, embarrassed or upset. Television has many contemporary reflections of life, but this is different – harking back to a gentler, slower age.'

Sarah Brown, the show's exec producer, says that while the show has been accused of being too twee: 'I think it stays on the

right side of sentimentality.

'It has a very solid, loyal audience that everyone assumes is female dominated, but a lot of husbands and boyfriends watch as well – they particularly like the comic characters.'

With a large cast – around 13 regulars plus supporting and guest actors – and 12 one-hour episodes in each series, the *Lark Rise to Candleford* team has plenty to contend with during a demanding filming schedule that requires them to spend many months away from home.

'A huge amount of work goes into the programme,' Tricklebank explains. 'We didn't finish filming until the middle of December – so it's a tight turnaround. We do the post production work as we go along, but it's always a case of trying to keep up with ourselves.'

Sarah Brown describes *Lark Rise* as 'period drama on a budget', and praises the ingenuity and hard work of the people who make it.

But despite the financial and meteorological challenges, spirits are high, says Tricklebank. 'The cast and crew get on well, and are very happy to be involved in such a lovely series.'

Happy as larks, you might say. **Lark Rise, BBC One, Sundays**

cutting edge



RORY CELLAN-JONES

What makes a story news?

IT SOUNDS LIKE A JOURNEY to geek heaven. I spent last week visiting the California headquarters of Facebook and Google, then roaming round the monstrous gadgetfest that is the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.

I'm grateful to have been sent to cover what I consider important stories about the technology that will shape our lives for years to come. But some people who contact me or complain to the BBC will say that we are conniving at product placement by major companies.

Should we, for instance, have covered the launch of a mobile phone, Google's Nexus One? I battled to persuade the company's PR team to let my cameraman into the news conference after they said there really wasn't room for us.

And while the American networks all had satellite trucks outside the launch, we took advantage of the wifi network which blankets the Googleplex to file for the *Ten O'Clock News*.

So I was just pleased to have got on air. But am I – in the words of one Twitter user – just a 'Google shill'? I must say I was quite amused to read that comment – in the fiercely partisan world of technology, I've been accused of being in the pocket of both Apple and Microsoft, but never before of being a paid promoter of the search engine giant.

I do think the Nexus One story was important, not because viewers and listeners need to know about every new phone that comes out, but because it tells us a lot about changing technology and a looming battle between two giant companies.

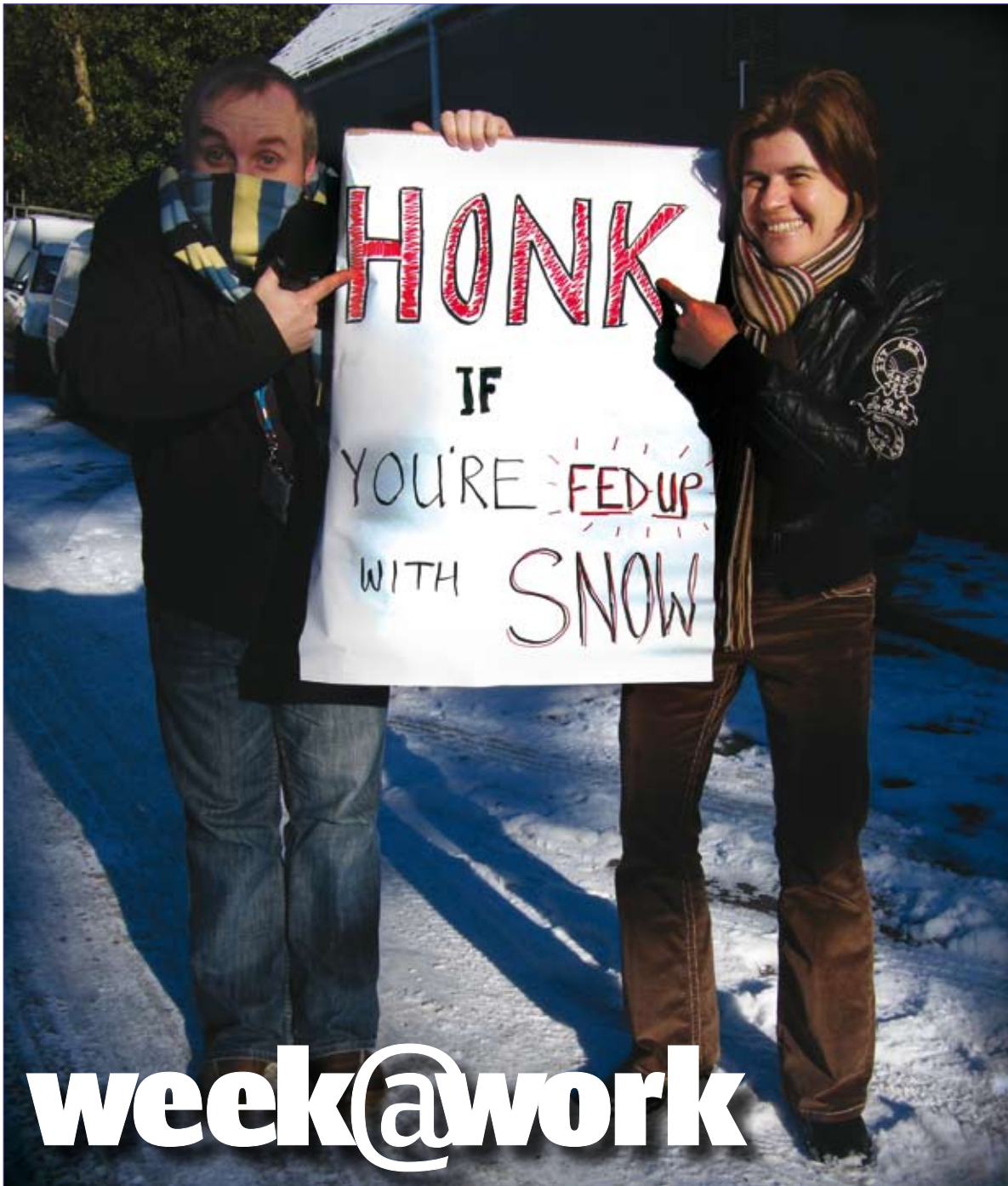
Apple fired the starting gun for the smartphone revolution when it launched the iPhone three years ago – and our coverage of that event was also questioned at the time. Now Google has signalled that it wants to be a major force in the mobile industry too.

Should I for that matter have taken viewers on a tour round Facebook headquarters, with its free food and ping-pong tables, or introduced them to the new e-reader, unveiled in Las Vegas by the British firm, Plastic Logic? The culture of a social networking business that now has more members than the population of the United States will obviously be of interest to many viewers.

As will the story of a British company taking fundamental research from Cambridge University and turning it into a product which could rival Amazon's Kindle.

The problem is that just about every technology story features companies which may stand to benefit from the coverage. But does that mean we can ignore what the likes of Google, Facebook or Apple are doing, and the impact they are having on our lives? A few weeks back a giant entertainment franchise and its 'chief executive' received plenty of BBC airtime. Simon Cowell and the *X Factor* made for a good story – but then again so did Google's Nexus One.

Rory Cellan-Jones is BBC technology correspondent



BBC IN ACTION

BBC DEVON'S DRIVETIME duo 'Shep and Jo' (aka David Shepherd and Jo Loosemore) went on a mission to get people who were fed up with the snow to honk their horns – all for their new afternoon show on the station.

Presenter Jo Loosemore said: 'We wanted to reflect the fact that people were fed up of slipping over and driving in the ice so we thought we'd give them something to smile about. The reaction was fantastic. We were getting eight honks a minute!'

Along with bringing listeners all the latest on school closures, news stories and essential information about the weather, Shep and Jo also found time to experience some of the fun that people were having by attempting to build the world's smallest snowman (below). Week@ Work is not convinced it'll make the Guinness Book of Records, though.

Shep and Jo is on between 3 and 7pm weekdays and includes the new news show, BBC Radio Devon's Nightly News, at 5pm.



CHANGING PLACES



PETER TAT (pictured) is leaving his bj post at BBC Lincolnshire to do an attachment with Radio 4 Audio and Music in Birmingham...

ROB UNSWORTH is stepping down as editor of *Watchdog* in order to become an editorial policy advisor for in-house factual programmes. He takes over from Su Pennington who is moving to a new role at the BBC Academy.

RACHEL STOCK has moved from her role as director of A&M HR to director of resourcing, with Richard Burdon taking over the position of director of A&M HR...

Over at the World Service, **LILIANE LANDOR** is head of the newly-created Middle East Region while **JERRY TIMMINS** remains head of Africa region and takes on the additional post as head of international relations.

It's all change at Radio Derby with breakfast editor **AFTAB GULZAR** on attachment to the Asian Network; Mid-morning producer **ALISON WHISON** off to *Midlands Today* for three months; reporter **KATE HENDERSON** to *Look North* in Hull for four months and broadcast assistant **GLEN JONES** on attachment to Radio Cambridge-shire's afternoon show.

WHATEVER GETS YOU THROUGH THE WEEK

NICK WALLIS Breakfast Show presenter at BBC Surrey



1 Twitter is a thing of wonder to me. Like off licences and cash-back, it is one of the few advances in human development that has made a tangible difference to my life.

2 I like it when listeners get in touch. They're often very funny and always have something useful to add. I don't even mind the abuse.

3 Ambition is one of the uglier qualities, but it does help when the alarm goes off at 4am. I am ambitious for the BBC Surrey breakfast show and determined to establish a significant audience for it.

4 Breakfast. I have to have breakfast before I go to work or the final hour of the show can make for an interesting listen.

5 I physically get to Guildford in an eight year-old VW Polo which, for some reason, I decided was called Clive. I thought this would make me more interesting, but it doesn't. It's just sad.



BBC NORTH

HOT SHOES

How do you fancy a couple of weeks (metaphorically) working in someone else's shoes? If you'd like to try something new, then don't miss out on the chance to apply for one of the BBC North 'Hot Shoe' placements.

This year's scheme launches on Wednesday and you've got a month to apply for the chance to be 'refreshed and inspired' and work with teams from *Dragons' Den* to 6Music.

<http://tinyurl.com/hotshoesinfo>

REMINDER

Is your Global Address List entry up to date? If you've recently changed job (or you're about to) then don't forget to send Directory Updates a message to let them know where you are moving to.

THE IT CROWD

Did you return from your holidays to find your email inbox overflowing with messages that are no longer relevant? BBC Radio Devon's John Govier explains how to create self-destructing emails that vanish if unread by a certain date...

Each time you send an email,

click on Options (it's in the View tab) and then check the box next to 'Expires After' and give your email a 'sell by' date.

When that date arrives, it will magically disappear from any inboxes where it hasn't yet been read, instantly cutting down the number of emails. Voila!



LEARNING CURVE

ARE YOU GETTING THE BEST FROM YOUR BOX?

Following the technical launch of High Definition on Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT), the BBC HD channel will now be available on each of the major UK tv platforms. To celebrate this achievement, Jo Gardiner, head of Freeview HD delivery, is hosting a session on everything you ever wanted to know about Freeview HD. This is your chance to learn what Freeview HD is, why it's good for audiences and what more you could be getting from your television.

The event takes place between 1.30-2.30pm on January 21 at the Think Tank, Media Centre, London W12. Email Peta Stameil to book yourself a place.



Prolonged preparation and a speedy shoot were key to delivering movie-style ambition on a CBBC budget. **Claire Barrett** meets the director of Spirit Warriors, which starts this month

Entering into the spirit

IMAGINE CROUCHING TIGER. Hidden Dragon meets The Incredibles. Throw in a cast of thousands, fire-breathing dragons, sumptuous magical universes and dazzling special effects, and you'd figure a major movie studio had struck box office gold.

But with some thorough groundwork and a fresh approach to action filming and visual imagery, CBBC has created a martial arts fantasy drama series that wouldn't look out of place in Hollywood.

Spirit Warriors, inspired by Chinese legend, follows a group of school children who are transported to a parallel spirit world. There, mentored by Chinese dragon Shen, they discover their spirit powers as they embark on a quest to find 12 legendary spirit pieces ahead of an evil warlord with world domination on his mind.

It was neophyte tv writer Jo Ho who inspired the children's drama department to shake off its natural modesty and think big. Her initial, unsolicited script, which drew on fantasy themes and tropes of gaming and manga, chimed with exec producer/director Jon East's notion of an ancient China-themed action/adventure for children.

'Spirit Warriors is testament to Jo's fertile imagination,' admits East, who spent a year and a half



Jon East's pencil drawings provided the foundation for the magical universe he wanted to build

honing a new script with the writer. 'It's wild, expansive and vast, borrowing from epic, mythological themes.'

But could his budget – between a quarter and a half of that for an average adult drama – conjure this sense of scale? Digital effects, after all, don't come cheap.



The key was finding a post production partner without costly overheads or preconceptions. 'Ret-ro-juice were no frills; they didn't have expensive premises in Soho with coffee and croissants,' East reflects. 'They were able to analyse each challenge with fresh eyes to see whether it could be achieved with, say, false perspective or mini-

atures rather than always leaping for the latest toy – CGI.'

An unusually long research and development period, when each shot was storyboarded with visual effects in mind, meant that by the time of the shoot, both the techniques and costs required were clear.

While East's concept art had provided a starting point for creating the mythical landscapes, the dragon proved a bigger beast to pin down. 'He had to be a Chinese dragon,' insists East. 'I had to drag everyone's imagination away from the concept of dinosaurs in order to arrive at an aesthetic that was original, fresh and distinctive, but still culturally authentic.'

Such a creature – partly-translucent and apparition-like – has not been seen on western screens before, claims the director who starts his series back in the real world of school trips and sibling rivalry. 'It makes it all the more amazing when they do step into the magical realm.'

Casting children is never easy, admits East – around 500 drama school/group pupils were seen while a further 100 responded to posters placed in Chinese cultural centres or cash and carries – but flexibility is essential. 'Originally the main character Bo had a little brother called Timothy,

but we just couldn't find him. Then a little girl came in who knocked our socks off, so Timothy became Jen.'

The blue screen technology proved no problem to the young actors who 'are used to fantasising', while they were unfazed by the break-neck pace of the shoot. 'Where an adult drama might shoot 25-30 slates a day, we'd be shooting 90. Adult actors may have found this speed disconcerting.'

Despite a brief brush with judo as a teenager, East called on choreographer Jude Poyer to devise the martial arts encounters, using storyboarding and digital doubles. 'We had to create our own martial art, similar to wushu. We couldn't have people hitting each other,' reasons East. 'These are archetypal battles taking place in a magical realm, not street brawls, and we had to create a metaphor for that activity.'

While East Asian films like Crouching Tiger and Hero have penetrated western children's culture, East believes it's the archetypes peppering the Chinese mythological landscape that will resonate most deeply with young audiences. 'The wise old man, the Shadow, the Hero – they're found in the story traditions of most cultures giving them universal appeal.'

TRACY BEAKER: PLEASE HANDLE WITH CARE

Jacqueline Wilson keeps a protective eye on her best known character's return to tv. **Claire Barrett** reports

TRACY BEAKER HAS GROWN UP, but she may not have shaken off that 'hayfever'. The return to CBBC of Jacqueline Wilson's care home scamp – after five years spent losing the curls and the rougher edges – is set to be a more heartfelt affair. And as fans of the first five series will know, a bit of emotion usually gets The Beaker's eyes watering.

'It's a little more serious,' agrees exec producer Josephine Ward of the new 13-parter, 'but it's still a lot of fun. It remains a comedy drama with a big heart.'

The original 2001 adaptation of Wilson's bestseller spawned one of CBBC's most enduring brands. It is the most repeated children's drama and is still the most watched.

A willingness to revisit the show had been brewing for some time, explains Ward. 'We discussed bringing it back as The Dumping Ground, without Tracy Beaker, but Jacqueline Wilson wanted the character included and she wanted Dani Harmer – who first played Tracy when she was 12 – to reprise the role.'

It was the author's idea that her heroine should return to the care home as a trainee care worker, granting her a foot in both camps as she seeks both professional respect and the trust of the children.

Anything Beaker-related needs Wilson's approval. It was at her behest that Cas Lester, who exec produced series one, joined the writing team, alongside Ellie Brewer, a writer on the first series, and Ben Ward. Involved at the development stage, Wilson also oversaw storylines and vetoed the emergence of a new leader of the pack. 'Series five finished with a girl, very much like Tracy Beaker, being dragged in to the Dumping Ground. But Jacqueline didn't want to go down that route – she didn't want one child who stood out.'



Back home: Dani Harmer reprises the role she first took on at the age of 12

Holding auditions across the country, the casting director sought a true mix of young talent, with a variety of accents one important objective. 'The shoot was in Newcastle, but the story isn't set there,' points out Ward. 'The first series was made in Ealing, the next four in Cardiff, while the Dumping Ground itself hasn't been the same building for two series running.'

As with previous programmes, there's a natural – rather than righteous – inclusiveness among the cast. Nine year-old Gus has high functioning Asperger's, craving routine and blundering socially – 'everyone lives with it; it's who he is'. Frank's cerebral palsy, meanwhile, can make him tricky to understand, but the other characters repeat his lines where necessary and allow Frank's humour and empathy to shine through.

The whimsical animations – drawn by Nick Sharratt and brought to life by Andy Walker – survived any inclination to distance this series from its predecessors. 'We weren't sure whether to include them,' reveals Ward, 'but our research told us that children wanted them.' Punctuating the live action, the cartoons were originally devised as the consciousness or fantasies of first Tracy, then other characters, and give vent to some bizarre flights of fancy.

The main break with the original format is in the length of the episodes. Previously clocking in at just 15 minutes, they are now 30, allowing greater depth of storytelling and exploration of feelings. The extra time makes it easier to appeal across CBBC's target demographic of 6-12 year-olds. 'There has to be something for everyone,' says Ward. 'There's more dramatic and emotional content for those at the top end and plenty of physical comedy for the youngest viewers.'

But will the audience accept a Tracy Beaker who's knocked on maturity's door? 'She's still outspoken,' reassures the exec, 'just not in everybody's face. And she still makes decisions that aren't necessarily the best ones. But she's lost the curly hair and dungarees.'

BBC Persian tv is celebrating its first anniversary after a dramatic 12 months, Sally Hillier reports



PHOTOGRAPH: ANNA GORDON

AS IF IT DOESN'T FACE ENOUGH CHALLENGES, such as a lack of journalistic firepower in Tehran and refusal of the authorities to be interviewed, BBC Persian television has just lost its place on the Hot Bird satellite.

The owners of Hot Bird removed it because constant jamming was affecting other services broadcast via the same satellite.

It was a bit of a pre-birthday spoiler for a network that celebrates its first anniversary on January 14 after an eventful 12 months during which, amid growing unrest in Iran, it has gained a reputation as 'the one to watch'.

Ironically, only a few weeks ago, Persian TV won the international Hot Bird Award for Best News Channel of 2009 and an impressive statuette now adorns its offices in W1.

Sadeq Saba, head of BBC Persian, smiles at the latest cool turn of events with Hot Bird but says he understands why it wants to protect its other satellite clients, and points out that negotiations are in hand with potential new providers. Meanwhile, the Persian tv service is still on two other satellites including Telestar 12, which is virtually unjammable because the uplink is in the United States. It is available as well on the internet.

Jamming, Saba believes, is testament to the success of the channel, which also broadcasts to Afghanistan and Tajikistan. 'Attempts to interfere with the signal show that we matter; that we are important,' he says.

Just before the channel launched a year ago, Iran put out a statement denouncing it as a plot to overthrow the Islamic Republic; now, along with many other observers, Saba sees the blacklist as evidence that the country is in big trouble.

'Issuing something like that is not the action of a regime that is confident and in control.'

Tension has been building ever since the disputed elections in June, when president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was controversially returned to power, and increasingly people are taking to the streets to voice their anger and demand change.

Some of the protests have turned violent, resulting in deaths, and so many opposition supporters have been arrested that Saba jokes: 'Soon there will be nobody left for us to talk to.'

In fact, there is no shortage of people available, and only too happy, to talk to BBC Persian tv, the only independent source of television news available in Iran.

Whatever happens we need to be prepared



On air: news presenter Nader Soltanpor
Left: intake producer Dena Tahmasebi and schedules co-ordinator Mohamad Ismail (back)
below: Sadeq Saba, head of service



Every day it receives hundreds of emails, calls and texts from Iranians who are prolific users of Twitter and other social media.

Citizen journalism is a key part of the news operation and Saba speaks of 'hundreds, if not thousands of people working for us', informally and unpaid, throughout the country.

'When something big happens, we are inundated with [picture] clips. At the height of the trouble in June [following the elections] we were getting six or seven clips every second.'

As for the professional newsgathering operation, Tehran's refusal to admit a Persian-speaking correspondent is clearly a disadvantage (its displeasure with the BBC was further highlighted last summer when it expelled English speaking correspondent Jon Leyne), but Saba believes that his team does a pretty good job in overcoming the problem.

A great deal of information gathering is done from London, he explains, using a wide range of contacts inside Iran, and there is input from a well-established network of correspondents in Beirut, Jerusalem, Kabul, Islamabad and Istanbul.

With the people in charge in Iran refusing to give interviews to the Persian tv service, how does it retain its independence and avoid becoming an opposition mouthpiece?

'The authorities might not talk to us, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't reflect their opinions,' Saba explains. 'They speak to Iranian tv and radio and

Iranian news agencies, so we monitor those carefully and pick up statements and interviews from there.'

'We are governed by BBC editorial values and it's crucial that we remain impartial and tell all sides of the story, especially as many of our viewers don't watch Iranian tv news at all because they've boycotted it.'

It also helps, in terms of maintaining balance, that pro-government speakers are enthusiastic contributors to *Your Turn*, the BBC's daily interactive programme.

Never intended as a news channel only, Persian tv, on air eight hours a day, also offers other programming such as natural history, sport and the arts. *Top Gear*, dubbed into Persian, is particularly popular.

Blokey *Top Gear* aside, the network is unusual in Arabic countries in having an equal number of male and (uncovered) female presenters.

Output is produced and presented by a young team – many under 30 and recruited from Iran – based in the new Egton Wing at Broadcasting House as part of a tri-media operation with BBC Persian radio, 70 years old this year, and ultra successful Persian online, which gets an average 40 million hits a month and more than 50 million during big news events.

As for the tv channel's success, no official audience figures are available, but a survey conducted by a government department in Iran put the audience at between 12-15 million among a population of around 71 million.

'When we started I thought we might get a couple of million viewers, but never imagined we would be so popular,' says Saba. 'We are professional and slick, offering something that nobody else provides.'

From the feedback, it is clear that large numbers of women watch and enjoy the channel.

Saba's ambitions now include strengthening delivery of the service – by using different frequencies and satellites to circumvent jamming – and extending transmission hours.

A bid has been made for extra money to do this, but much will depend on the next World Service grant-in-aid settlement, due next year.

Ideally, given the current troubles and uncertainties in Iran, Saba and his team would like to get the channel ready to turn into a 24-hour rolling news operation should events demand it.

'Iran is going through a period of instability, and we have to be prepared,' he says firmly.

This is the page that everybody reads. Please email claire.barrett@bbc.co.uk
You can also contribute to the mail page directly from the Ariel Online home page

Leaving room for more

Following Jonathan Ross's announcement that he is to leave the BBC, can we expect the recruitment of 1000 new journalists or producers?

Mark Crossan

producer, The Movie Cafe, Radio Scotland

School's out for 2010

I was interested to read BBC correspondents' predictions for 2010 in last week's Ariel. But something missing, surely? Where was education?

Apart from the fact that education is always a political battlefield in an election year, the thousands of BBC staff who are parents might just have a passing interest in what's in store for the education system in the coming year.

Wendy Jones, *head of policy and public affairs, BBC Learning*

Door shuts on digital

I am dismayed to hear that the powers that be plan to extend the digital con to radio, proposing to switch off a large proportion of the traditional services by 2016.

Quite apart from the issues of poorer quality – because those in charge care not one wit for the picture or listening standard, but more about how many revenue earning streams they can jam into the space available – I'd like to share my latest digital radio experience to explain why retaining analogue is essential.

I have a portable DAB receiver which I use on my commute, which works reasonably well. That was until I boarded a particular type of train out of the Bush last week. Upon closing the doors, the DAB signal abruptly ceased. Nothing. Nada. Not a click or a pop. So I stood there, in the silence, wondering who it could be that would manufacture something that completely cuts off any form of digital communication. The answer was etched into the glass of the carriage. Siemens. Ah. QED.

Andy Richards

editor, studios and post production

Christmas giveaway

So Matt Smith is the new Doctor. The latest regeneration happened

Special request to slip out of the mainstream

For me music is everything; it is what keeps the world turning and makes it such a wonderful place to live in. I love listening to records that are different and that can change your life, even if it is just for the length of a song.

The last year in music has been amazing. So many great records have been released by bands and artists from all over the world and from all different genres of music. But there is a problem, they just don't get played by the BBC. As much as I understand the point of playlists

and their role in programming, I don't understand why the specialist music shows seem to be holding back on playing music that is different from the mainstream.

Isn't the point of a specialist music show to be just that – special. There's nothing wrong with being different or alternative, as the 2009 Christmas Number One showed us. Sometimes it is a breath of fresh air.

Cat Norris

broadcast assistant, BBC Essex

after a dastardly plan hatched by The Doctor's old foe, The Master, who came back despite his apparent demise in the last series.



I knew all this before the programme was broadcast. The new Doctor's identity has been public for months, and we know about the Master's return thanks to all those BBC trails. I'm only glad The Usual Suspects wasn't a BBC series.

Peter Dixon

online bj, BBC Hull

Blinded by the light

Re 'EastEnders' Facebook generation belongs online' (Ariel, January 5).

Funny, I thought we worked in the communications industry... but then Clare Bolt comes up with this fantastically obtruse bit of future-speak: 'Green lit by multiplatform commissioning exec Rosie Allimonos'. Eh?

Blue sky thinking? Left in the dark? Seeing red?

Neil Smith

sbj, Radio Cumbria (Barrow)

Fine tooth-comb

Isn't it a pain when you get that letter telling you that you've been fined for stopping in a box junction

or London red route? Well, this is nothing compared to the far greater shock you may be in for if you're driving a BBC vehicle and are informed by fleet management that you've been spotted committing a minor motoring offence.

'Do you want us to pay the fine for you and deduct it from your salary?' they will ask. If you agree (as I did) they will pay it and then charge you for the privilege.

Eight weeks later, after the £60 fine had been paid, I got an email from Fleet Management telling me that £75 would be deducted from my salary to cover the fine and 'associated admin charges'.

Surely they should be telling us it will cost £15 at the outset?

Nick Woolley, *senior broadcast camera journalist, newsgathering*

Bin there, done that

The office bin has been an integral part of office life and a major motivational tool. Who can forget throwing a banana skin (narrowly missing your colleagues) and slam dunking straight into the bin? Pure satisfaction. Handy either being used as a 'look out' post while jolly japes are being carried out or as a leg up for any budding jockeys.

For any bash it could (by placing it on your head) be seen as the latest fashion statement with people saying 'is that a bin on your head or are you just pleased to see me'.

Their loyalty couldn't be questioned, no matter what rubbish and

abuse you gave it, it was back the next day for more.

RIP dear friend

Mike Hughes

business manager, BBC Academy

Sweet on supermarket



How many points on its Nectar Card did the BBC get for this (One O'Clock News, Wednesday, January 6)?

Barnaby Perkins

stills library

I'm the quiet man

I was touched by the BBC's coverage of Remembrance and Armistice Day in November, which was reflected in Ariel. I wonder how many readers realise that the current high levels of respect for the Armistice Day two minute silence are down to a former member of staff?

For it was my idea, presented to the Royal British Legion following my early retirement as senior events producer (radio) in 1994, that led to a change of emphasis from Remembrance Sunday to a two minute silence in the working week.

I had been asked by the Legion to

sit on a committee looking at ways of raising its profile. The Legion decided to try out my suggestion of a switch back to the idea of a national silence and appointed me project director.

That PR campaign later won the two top PR industry awards and raised the RBL profile at a time when Remembrance was otherwise in decline. We put Remembrance back into the classroom, into every courtroom in the land, every supermarket and every sports venue. The biggest problem I faced was persuading the BBC to adopt a new two minute silence ritual on the 11th.

How things have changed. I was both humbled by, and proud of, the scale of the recent coverage and hope those responsible will carry on the precedent. And may I commend Nick Witchell for his splendid commentary from Whitehall. He carries the torch previously held by the greatest of the BBC's outstanding commentators and he carries it well.

David France

Dorset

Will death do you?

I am happy to read that SPAGGIS is alive and well (November 17). Like many other retired staff I was glad of the opportunity to maintain my cover on taking unwilling early retirement in 1994.

In 2007 I fell while descending from a viewpoint in a motorway service area near Mont St Michel, France and was hospitalised for ten days having snapped the main muscle in my left thigh. I still suffer severe stiffness, adversely affecting my main hobby, walking, as well as climbing stairs and driving, and was out of pocket by over £1200.

I made a claim on SPAGGIS which was then being run by Norwich Union. I should have saved my breath and my time. Their consultant, after a cursory examination, declared I had made a good recovery and refused to support a pay out.

The only reason I still pay into SPAGGIS is that one day I might die in an accident. Perhaps then their 'consultant' will be satisfied?

David France

senior producer events and travel (ret'd)

OBITUARY

MICHAEL PRYCE

You could hear his roaring laughter from 50 paces. Michael Pryce was big on fun, an enormous character although his ego was greatly contained. He'd find fun in everything, whether it was the fortunes of his beloved Aston Villa FC, the bawdy behaviour of *Men Behaving Badly* on tv, or a silly take on a news story.

We met around 1995 when I was at London's Choice FM and he was at the BBC World Service. I was im-

PHOTOGRAPH: CVM TV



pressed by his success, he was excited being close to Choice FM's Caribbean audiences, and we soon found ourselves swapping employers.

Michael revelled in the environment of black music and news, introducing international music acts live on stage and presenting live literary events. But he always remained accessible, ready to give advice to young people looking to break into the media.

He also spent an absolute fortune on his vinyl addiction, collecting hundreds of records to expand his vast collection. This was reflected in his knowledge, not just of music, but

of politics and current affairs. The guy could talk about anything to anyone, a characteristic that could only enforce his reputation as a charmer.

Although many of his friends put it down to blind ambition, he always talked about working in Jamaica, and in 1997 he succeeded, joining TVJ as a reporter, then rising even higher to become a key news anchor at CVM TV.

Known as 'English' or 'BBC' to the public, Michael became one of Jamaica's leading journalists, his broad Brummie tones smoothed out for interviews with all the big names in Jamaican politics and industry.

A reputation for being in the front line and venturing into dangerous areas grew, and he was even attacked during one assignment, an incident that could only elevate him within the affection of the nation's viewers.

As an open character, Michael was quite candid about his illness. In 2006 he returned to the UK for cancer treatment, and again last summer, but last month Michael died from complications caused by multiple myeloma.

Michael is survived by his wife Maxine and two daughters.

Errol Murray

FOR RENT

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Acton Lane, Chiswick, Light and airy modern one bedroom ground floor flat. £1,100pcm. Available 1 February. Details and pictures at <http://web.me.com/rfgibb/234/ActonLane.html> or call 07778 198106

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C 15-Jan-10 A 12 months

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London
Media Centre
5D/Ref: 245948
C 19-Jan-10 A 06 months

Network Scheduler
Birmingham
5D/Ref: 23687009
C 18-Jan-10 A 09 months

Weather Presenter
Belfast - Broadcasting House
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C 19-Jan-10 A 06 months

**Broadcast Journalist /
Newyddiadurwr Darlledu,
WIWO**
Cardiff
5/7D/Ref: 239515
C 14-Jan-10

**Unit Assistant, 6Music
(part-time)**
London
Western House
4D/Ref: 246027
C 25-Jan-10

**PA Head of Music, R1 & 1X
and the Editor 1X**
London
Yalding House
4D/Ref: 23863009
C 18-Jan-10 A 05 months

**Broadcast Assistant, BBC
Radio Nottingham**
Nottingham
3/4D/Ref: 22004909
E C 22-Jan-10 A 09 months

**Production Management
Assistant Pool - London**
London
3D/Ref: 23308009
E C 31-Jan-10 A 12 months

**Production Management
Assistant Pool - Bristol**
Bristol
3D/Ref: 23307709
E C 31-Jan-10 A 12 months

**Contracts & Auditions
Assistant**
London
Maida Vale
3D/Ref: 238061
E C 19-Jan-10 A 06 months

**Publicity Assistant, BBC
Proms**
London
3D/Ref: 233418
E C 20-Jan-10 A 07 months

Runner Pool - London
London
2D/Ref: 23308109
E C 31-Jan-10 A 12 months

Runner Pool - Manchester
Manchester
2D/Ref: 23307909
E C 31-Jan-10 A 12 months

Runner Pool - Bristol
Bristol
2D/Ref: 23307809
E C 31-Jan-10 A 12 months

Runner Pool - Birmingham
Birmingham
2D/Ref: 23307609
E C 31-Jan-10 A 12 months

JOURNALISM

**Commissioning Editor,
World News**
London
Media Centre
SENEX/Ref: 245120
C 19-Jan-10

Bureau Editor, Asia/Pacific
Beijing
11S/Ref: 245715
C 15-Jan-10 A 2 years

Editor, Five Live Sport
London / Salford Quays
11D/Ref: 246870
C 22-Jan-10

**Development Producer,
BBC North**
London/Salford Quays
9D/Ref: 246042
C 25-Jan-10

Sponsored Reporter, Paris
Paris
8/9D/Ref: 245906
C 25-Jan-10 A 2 years

**Project Manager, Editorial
Policy**
London
White City
8D/Ref: 244810
C 25-Jan-10 A 09 months

**Assistant Producer, Drama
(Middle East)**
London
Bush House
7D/Ref: 246332
C 18-Jan-10 A 18 months

Newyddiadurwr Fideo
Aberystwyth
7D/Ref: 246210
C 28-Jan-10

**Broadcast Journalist -
Entertainment, Newsbeat**
London
Yalding House
7D/Ref: 245168
C 18-Jan-10 A 06 months

Researcher
London/Salford Quays
5D/Ref: 247014
C 25-Jan-10 A 12 months

**Researcher/Assistant
Producer, Question Time**
London
5D/Ref: 246499
C 25-Jan-10
Secondment 06 months

**Breakfast Producer
(Broadcast Journalist)**
Taunton
5/7D/Ref: 245022
E C 20-Jan-10 A 06 months

Team Assistant
London/Salford Quays
3/4D/Ref: 247015
C 25-Jan-10 A 12 months

BUSINESS SUPPORT
AND MANAGEMENT

**Head of Planning and
Scheduling BBC FOUR**
London
SM2/Ref: 246163
E C 19-Jan-10 A 12 months

Finance Specialist
London
White City
10D/Ref: 246553
E C 18-Jan-10

**Senior Strategy Adviser,
BBC Trust**
London
10D/Ref: 244855
E C 25-Jan-10 A 06 months

**Web Editor, Press Office
website**
London
TV Centre
9D/Ref: 246630
C 21-Jan-10 A 04 months

**Business Systems
Manager, A&M**
London
Henry Wood House
9D/Ref: 245831
C 26-Jan-10

**Plan, Schedule and Finance
Manager BBC THREE**
London
9D/Ref: 245769
C 18-Jan-10 A 06 months

**Unit Manager, BBC
Scotland Childrens**
Glasgow
8D/Ref: 246031
C 17-Jan-10

**Pan BBC Accountant /
Cyfrifydd y BBC Cyfan**
Cardiff
8D/Ref: 24534309
E C 24-Jan-10

Business Accountant
London
TV Centre
8D/Ref: 23974309
E C 13-Jan-10

**Business Development Co-
Ordinator**
London
Bush House
5D/Ref: 227978
C 18-Jan-10 A 06 months

Team Assistant
London
Media Centre
3D/Ref: 239320
C 19-Jan-10 A 12 months

**Business Assistant, BBC
Proms**
London
2D/Ref: 229100
E C 25-Jan-10 A 06 months

NEW MEDIA

**Web Researcher / SEO
Analyst**
London
Media Centre
5D/Ref: 245913
E C 14-Jan-10 A 06 months

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Tour**
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TECHNOLOGY

**Finance and Benefits Lead,
DMI Programme**
London
White City
10D/Ref: 22861409
E C 13-Jan-10 A 18 months

**Software Engineer -
Interactive TV Platforms**
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7D/Ref: 245690
E C 25-Jan-10

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Media Centre
SENEX/Ref: 23921709
E C 22-Jan-10

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Assistant**
London
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See Attachment

California
calling

Comedy producer
Colin Anderson is at San
Francisco local radio

THE FIRST TIME tracking my own voice for local San Francisco station, KALW, is a horrible experience. I slur my speech, misread words, sound worryingly like a nuisance phone-caller and find a renewed awe for the people I work with back home. Reading words into a microphone, it turns out, is not as easy as the pros make it look.

I'm in California, on a BBC Stepping Stones placement, to gain experiences like this, hurtling out of my comfort zone to hone my production skills, learn New World radio techniques and – in a nation practically devoid of it – learn from podcasters what the future of radio comedy might sound like.

I spent Boxing Day morning eating pancakes in a diner with one of my personal comedy heroes, Jesse Thorn. He produces shows from his apartment and



with listeners now donating directly to support his work, he sees his public radio broadcasts merely as free hour-long adverts for his podcasting. To him, the permanently downloadable podcast, not the ephemeral broadcast, is the valuable end product.

My time at KALW has been filled with similar revelations and they've cut both ways. I've introduced the KALW team to new editing tricks and a fresh editorial perspective and have learned in return about story structure and creative audio use in features.

I've been reporting, engineering and producing on a daily news show, put out on a shoestring budget by a couple of full-time staff and a stream of amateur volunteers. In terms of connecting with your audience, you don't get much better than having most of them help make the programmes!

They're all wrangled together into an effective (and award winning) news team by an editor who gives feedback on scripting and edit structure and sends thank you emails at the end of each day.

Back in Radio Comedy we've not had to resort to a volunteer team so far, but we often rely on star contributors' fondness for the medium, their commitment to the work, or the suggestion that 'hey, maybe it'll transfer to tv'. That's another small, but priceless thing that this placement has shown me – the value of a well-timed thank-you note. Thanks, KALW.

Stepping Stones is run by the BBC Academy's College of Leadership, which facilitates 3-6 month placements for staff to learn new skills and ways of working. For more on the 2010 scheme, see http://explore.gateway.bbc.co.uk/steppingstones/stepping_stones.aspx

Been anywhere nice? Send your attachment stories to Clare Bolt

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MICHEÁL JACOB

HEAD OF THE COLLEGE OF COMEDY

What is the College of Comedy?

Mark Freeland, head of comedy, was interested in training new writers so asked me to come up with a scheme. In the first year we had 3500 applications for just six places. I completely knackered myself with that so this year raised the qualification standard and got 1300 applicants which was more manageable.

How did you choose between them?

I insist on reading everything and trust my own judgment but the first thing is, does it make me laugh.

What does make you laugh?

Good writing, good characters, something a bit unexpected. I like somebody with a voice and a unique style. All the best comedy is a slightly sideways look at the world so you want someone who's got that sensibility. It's not about jokes.

What makes a good character?

They need to feel like real people, with some depth and some exaggerated characteristics that make them funny. I think the great classic comedies have all been about people you can identify with or have met.

Have you got a favourite comedy?

Yes, too many. I suppose my

favourite is the one that broke the mould – *It's Garry Shandling's Show*. I also love the Larry Sanders show, *Fawlty Towers* and *Porridge*.

You've had a fascinatingly diverse career

Whether it was publishing, journalism or public relations, writing was my thing. I've always loved words and writing and have always been interested in people.

Is there much bad comedy around?

Yes, but comedy is incredibly imprecise and nobody ever sets out to make a bad show. It is the most difficult area of tv to get right and most new comedies fail.

You were a bit of a telly obsessive...

I came from a little village in southern Ireland and we didn't get a tv until I was 14 when I used to watch everything. I wanted to be a drama director because I'd done quite a bit of theatrical stuff at school. I was rather an arty little git.

You had a stab at the rock and roll life

When I worked at Collins [publishers], I met a bloke called Laurence Marks. We formed a band and went pro for about 18 months but we didn't earn enough to live on so I got a job at the Church of England press office.



PHOTOGRAPH: MARK BASSETT

What happened after that?

I kept in touch with Laurence and, together with his old friend Maurice Gran, we formed another band called Spoon. They went on to become Marks and Gran with a string of hit comedy shows including *Shine on Harvey Moon* and *Birds of a Feather*.

Did that get you started in comedy?

Yes. Laurence and Maurice had massive success with *Birds* and I became script reader, then script editor, for their new company, Alomo, working

on 80 episodes. I ended up as head of development. I have been at the BBC now for about eight years where I've developed and execed *The Smoking Room*, *2 Pints*, *Grownups* and *My Family*.

What are your plans for the college?

Having found 12 writers in two years my plan is to regroup and work with them for the next year. Most of them are involved with shows – writing sketches or an episode of something.

Any tips for budding comedy writers?

Have at least three projects on the go. One out there, one you're writing and an idea for the next one. There's a lot of sitting around waiting for a response, and it's good to be busy.

What other interests do you have?

My big passion is Arsenal. I model myself on Mr Wenger because he's brilliant at spotting talent and giving it a chance. He believes in playing football purely, which means that sometimes we lose.

Interview by Sue Llewellyn

WE'RE BANGING THE DRUM FOR PETE LOCKETT

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THE ARIELATOR

A weekly take on life at the BBC: who's up, who's down, who's off

UPSIDE Somehow it's hard to picture *Sex in the City*'s Carrie Bradshaw (left) tuning into the **World Service** after a hard evening treading the tiles in New York's most achingly exclusive new nightspots, but the actor who plays her has recently been bigging up the station. 'Sarah Jessica Parker says she loves BBC WS and listens to it every night from her home in New York,' revealed Mary Hockaday in last week's newsroom update. It seems that before her *Woman's Hour* interview,

Jessica Parker spent her time enthusing about the WS, admiring the 'objective way' it tells the news and remarking that she 'finds the global perspective particularly interesting'. Perhaps SJP is on the look out for a new gig if her latest rom-com with Hugh Grant goes the way of the shellsuit.

DOWN SIDE He may play a central character in one of the most watched programmes in the UK, but life for *EastEnders* star Adam 'Ian Beale' Woodyatt isn't all champagne and caviar.



Last week the actor was using Twitter to complain about the quality of food on offer at the BBC. He posted a photo of a paper plate half full of anonymous looking gruel ('we were told it was some sort of lamb') to prove his point, adding that 'Babs and Pam reckon I've made it look much better than it actually was'. Woodyatt later realised the tweet may prove controversial, but remained unrepentant: 'I've probably opened a can of worms with that earlier tweet... If I have, I hope the caterers don't use them for spaghetti!' No wonder he brings his own lunch.

EARWIGGING

OVERHEARD AT THE BBC

...There are going to be more BBC News trucks out than gritters tomorrow...

...I'm fed up with hearing about snow on the news – it's turning into Newzac, which is worse than Muzac...

...I'm trying to do a piece on snow and business...

...Sorry, but the shoot's been cancelled – Dizzee Rascal has toothache...

... 'Do you know what our budget is?' 'Yes... er... No.. er... ish' ...



ICE-COLD IN THE OFFICE



New lab: the R&D department at Kingswood Warren



New office: Nik Muttaluri, Simon Lumb and Andy Mace

LAST WEEK'S SNOW

CHAOS meant that for many, the rare privilege of working from home was foisted upon them by the icy hands of Jack Frost. The daring few who actually made it into the office – through all the ice, kids building snow daleks, and hordes of shoppers frantically buying thermal underwear – had to make do as best they could. Thankfully, staff resourcefulness levels went into overdrive...

'We in Television Platforms Manchester are embracing new ways of working and are fully acclimatising to the situation up north,' said software engineer Andy Mace, presenting snaps of their new 'office'. It came complete with 'snowfas', a televi-

sion ('it's a bit flakey,' admits Andy) and even a special desk that cools laptops with the power of snow to prevent them overheating – so no more toasted nether regions.

Over in Surrey, the R&D department decided to build a new lab out of snow, complete with aerial. 'We thought the move from Kingswood to our new R&D South labs was taking too long, so we decided

to build our own,' said R&D engineer Sam Davies (far right, crouching) by way of an explanation. It only took them an hour and a half to build as well – take that, W1 Project!

New desk:
David Twyford



WE HEAR THAT...

THE DRESSING

room door sign for BBC Two quiz show *Pointless* (right) has been confusing a few people...



TECH REPORTER

Dan Simmons's upper-body strength is perhaps not one of his most discussed attributes, but was well in evidence at the Consumer Electronics Show last week in Las Vegas. Presenting a piece for tech show *Click* about an apparently 'unbreakable' mobile phone, Dan was challenged by a smiling American salesman to do his best to break it. First he placed it in a fish tank, with no ill effects. Then, perhaps taking out his frustration at all the poor quality mobiles he has to review, he proceeded to repeatedly smash it on the corner of the tank. The screen came off, much to the astonishment of all concerned and the evident glee of Dan. See it at tinyurl.com/phonesmash

EAGLE-EYED TIM 'Mandrake' Walker of the Telegraph spotted some interesting conversation on the Points of View website last week. It seems that a couple of viewers took exception to the amount of cleavage displayed by breakfast presenter Susanna Reid when she interviewed Hugh Grant. The criticism also included allegations of 'flirtatious' hair tossing, and behaviour akin to that of a '14 year old school girl on her first date'. Unfazed, Reid told Walker that she had 'come to accept that you can't please all of the people all of the time. However, after breastfeeding three children,' she added, 'I'm amazed people still think I have a cleavage worth complaining about.'

Win a book of EastEnders interviews



THOUGH LARRY Jaffee resides in New York, he still manages to edit and publish the Walford Gazette – the only newspaper solely dedicated to *EastEnders* in the world. As he puts it: 'Many of these actors don't talk to the British press because of the tabloids' typically scandalous coverage of their personal lives. But they have granted exclusive in-

terviews to the Walford Gazette, which respects their privacy and focuses instead on the craft of acting.' Now Jaffee has compiled 52 interviews from the paper's 18 year history into one book, *Albert Square & Me* (rrp \$30). We have five to give away. To enter to win one, tell us: Who originally played Peggy Mitchell in *EastEnders*? Email ariel competitions by January 18.