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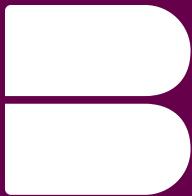
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T H E H E A D

DIRECTED BY
JORGE DORADO

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE OCEAN
THERE IS NOWHERE TO RUN

THE
MEDIAPRO
STUDIO

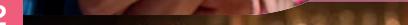


Banijay
Rights

Marie Antoinette



Bali 2002



Serial Lover



Then You Run



The Forest Of The Missing





Rogue Heroes

Domina



Anonymous



Riches

Stonehouse



#Storymakersforalifetime

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Dodging the bullet

Show cancellations are a fact of life in television, but some series get a second chance. Mark Layton finds out what it takes to pull a series back from the brink

It is never welcome news when a show gets cancelled, but it can feel particularly unfortunate when a scripted series is canned; potentially ending on a cliffhanger that will never be resolved.

While this is the price that is sometimes paid to tell stories in the profit- and ratings-focused medium of television, cancellation is not always the end.

Commissioners might backtrack and stay their hand from the chopping block, sure, but more unusual is that, every once in a while, a third-party network or platform steps in to save the day and gives a show a second chance at life.

Finding the right fit

There is no real hard-and-fast rulebook for rescuing shows from cancellation, and decisions, it seems, are very much taken on a case-by-case basis by networks and platforms.

Lauren Anderson, head of AVOD original content and programming at Amazon Studios, tells TBI that there are “regular conversations” about stepping in to renew another network’s show, but “every show is a bit different”. Just the same as when making an original commission or show acquisition, the series has got to make sense for the service and its audience.

Amazon-owned AVOD service Freevee brought back two scripted shows this year; handing second seasons to both *American Rust*, the Jeff Daniels-led crime drama that was dropped by Showtime, and *Almost Paradise*, another crime drama, which originated on NewsNation (fka WGN America).

The latter decision, Anderson reveals, was an easy one to make: not only had Freevee become the show’s streaming home since its cancellation, but the AVOD had an existing partnership with *Almost Paradise* producer Electric Entertainment via its original commission *Leverage: Redemption*, a revival of 2008-2012 series *Leverage*.



That revival was born after the streamer saw the positive audience response to *Leverage*, which it had licensed, in much the same way as it has similarly brought back *Bosch* as *Bosch: Legacy*.

Anderson sees renewing *Almost Paradise* as an extension of the same strategy. *Leverage: Redemption* and *Almost Paradise* not only share a production company, but also a cast member in Christian Kane – who has a devoted fan following, known as Kaniacs – and Anderson says there was clear opportunity to bring existing viewers more of what they enjoy.

For *Almost Paradise*, the synergies were clear, whereas Anderson says that *American Rust* is “a totally different example,” with the decision coming down to timing, as well as, again, whether it would appeal to the audience and how it would fit amongst the service’s existing offering.

“At the same time that they were hoping they could find a home, we also saw an opportunity based on the quality of the show, the incredible cast and the creators of the show,” says Anderson. “We thought that our audience on Freevee was aligned with the audience of *American Rust* and we felt we could support the show, both with

Almost Paradise was an attractive opportunity for Freevee to ‘save’ due to the existing relationship with its producer and audience familiarity with the show

series that we had coming prior to *American Rust* on our service and those that were going to come after.”

For *American Rust* show creator Daniel Futterman, being picked up by Freevee was one of those rare opportunities to continue the series. He says he feels “incredibly fortunate” that Anderson was interested in picking up the show and for keeping the production very much as it always had been.

“We were all in agreement; let’s make the show that we were making. That meant bringing back the same cast and making the show for the same budget. Besides that, we were given free rein with story.”

The sole impact that the transition from Showtime to Freevee had, reveals Futterman, was that “due to the downtime while we were looking for a home (and then the natural time it took to get the deals done) we lost some treasured writers and crew who needed to take other jobs.

“But we’ve got all our cast back and have filled positions that were open with tremendously talented new folks.”

The ultimate pilot process

Over at NBC, meanwhile, Jeff Bader, president of program planning & strategy for NBC Entertainment, says that a show pick-up must “make sense financially,” while networks should be sure that “the show has a core fan base and that producers believe there is still creative energy left and compelling storylines to be told.”

Earlier this year, NBC picked up action-drama series *Magnum P.I.*, a remake of the 1980s series of the same name, for a fifth season after it was dropped from its original home on CBS.

Also, last year, NBC concluded cop comedy *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* with its eighth season. The show could have come to an end much sooner, as it was cancelled by original commissioner Fox after its fifth season, with NBC stepping in the very next day to give the popular programme another three years.

“Both shows were owned by our studio, Universal Television, so the risk factor was much lower than if we were buying them from an outside studio,” says Bader, who adds: “*Brooklyn Nine-Nine* was a top show on Hulu and is still showing signs of growth.”

Aside from fan loyalty, there are other clear benefits to saving a show rather than developing a new original series.

“You have a built-in audience; you have built-in awareness; you have a creative team – if you believe in the fundamentals of the original series then that means that the creative team has executed on the vision that you think aligns with what audiences want to watch. Obviously, you have performance data; in some cases you have the cast, or a portion of the cast,” says Anderson, who likens rescuing a series to “the ultimate pilot process.”

She explains: “You have a proof of concept. In old school pilot processes, you put the show together, you have a pilot, then based on that you decide that you’re going to make many more episodes – whereas if you rescue a show then you’ve got not just a first episode



American Rust (above) moved to Freevee after being cancelled by Showtime, while *Magnum P.I.* (right) found a new home on NBC after it was dropped by CBS

but many episodes to say, ‘yes, I think that this works.’

Bader adds: “With an existing series, you have a built-in fanbase and you don’t need to spend money introducing the show to viewers.”

However, despite all the pros, the NBC exec cautions that there is a possible, and rather obvious, con in rescuing a cancelled show – the fact that it was cancelled in the first place. “The show could be losing its lustre on another network and just because it’s moving doesn’t mean it will become a hit.”

Rights & timings

Delving into the nitty gritty of these deals, in the US, Bader reveals: “The previous network doesn’t benefit when the show is picked up by someone else. Only the studio benefits since they own the show. Networks don’t own the shows nor have rights to previous seasons.”

However, that is not necessarily the case in every territory. Jeremy Roberts, head of film & TV at London-based specialist media law firm Sheridans, says that in the UK: “The issues are really ones of rights and timings.”

He explains: “Firstly, who has the right to produce the subsequent season? For shows produced in the UK for the main PSB channels, the producer will usually have that right. For the rest, it will often be owned or controlled by the broadcaster or platform – although there is usually a turnaround mechanism allowing the producer to reacquire the subsequent season rights on pre-agreed terms.”

These turnaround terms will normally give the original broadcaster or platform some kind of carried interest, explains Roberts, “perhaps in the form of a passive rights fee or profit share, or both. They are also likely to have some remaining broadcast rights in the earlier seasons. A deal might have to be done on those, as the new buyer may not want the previous seasons on a competing platform.”



Then, beyond the original broadcaster or platform’s rights, the producer will need to look at issues such as underlying rights, scriptwriters and cast.

“If the cancelled series is based on a novel, there may be a turnaround provision where the right to produce further seasons reverts to the owner, although a properly negotiated acquisition agreement should give the producer an opportunity to place the series elsewhere before the turnaround kicks in,” says Roberts.

“A main writer, or showrunner, of a previous season might have an option to write some of the episodes of the new season. Usually, that’s fine – indeed desirable – but sometimes those writer options have no time limit, and, if a long period of time has passed, the writer may no longer be the right person.”

The cast, he explains, is usually optioned for subsequent seasons for 12 months, so, by the time the original broadcaster or platform has cancelled, the cast options may have expired. If they have, cast availability may be an issue, and cast deals will have to be redone.

Any network or platform looking to rescue a show from an early demise should keep these issues in mind, but when the right opportunity to take on the right show presents itself, the potential rewards appear clear. **TBI**

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Script to Screen: Blue Lights



Mark Layton delves deep into the creative process with screenwriting partners Declan Lawn and Adam Patterson about *Blue Lights*, their new Belfast-based police drama headed to the BBC later this year

Declan Lawn and Adam Patterson, the writing and directing partners behind 2020 BBC drama *The Salisbury Poisonings*, are back with *Blue Lights*, a new six-part series digging deep into the realities of policing in their hometown of Belfast.

Response policing in the Northern Irish city is not like policing anywhere else, say the show creators. Patterson likens it to “trench warfare”, with *Blue Lights* less about “the complexity of a murder investigation” and more “the simplicity of being punched in the face.”

Blue Lights is set to debut on UK pubcaster BBC One and VOD service iPlayer later this year, while distributor BBC Studios has

brought the series to MIPCOM this month where it is available for international acquisition.

Act one – Good intentions vs pragmatism

The series hails from Belfast-based Gallagher Films, whose founder Louise Gallagher produced Lawn and Patterson’s 2020 short film *Rough*, and *Patrick Melrose* producer Two Cities Television, run by ex-BBC execs Stephen Wright and Michael Jackson.

Having already brought Wright on board, Gallagher approached the writing duo with the project. “Someone she knew very well had left



social work in Northern Ireland to become a cop at age 41,” explains Lawn. “The experience of that person was really interesting, joining the police in midlife and also coming at it from a social work background.”

Lawn reveals that he and Patterson had always been interested in creating a drama based in their hometown and were intrigued by the project from the beginning.

“This person became one of the central characters in the show – Grace,” reveals Patterson, who says that this allowed them to explore how “the idealism that someone has – somebody who essentially wants to do good in the world – butts right up against the pragmatism of policing.”

(L-R) Nathan Braniff & Richard Dormer work to maintain law and order on the streets of Belfast, where policing can be like “trench warfare” for officers

From that kernel, the narrative began to emerge, with *Blue Lights* following three rookie police officers: Grace (Siân Brooke), Annie (Katherine Devlin) and Tommy (Nathan Braniff), each facing immense pressure during their probation and not fully aware of the peril they have placed themselves in by taking the job.

Former social worker Grace struggles to balance the personal and professional; Annie signed up on a whim and now faces hostility from her local community; while Tommy, already earmarked for a senior role due to his academic qualifications, is disastrously inept at practical frontline response policing.

It’s not all doom and gloom, however, as Lawn reveals the show balances “a mixture of darkness and humour”. He adds: “Richard Dormer is a central role in that. He plays Constable Jerry Cliff, always there with the one liner, a natural born rebel.”

Lawn & Patterson met with 25-to-30 Northern Irish police officers, some serving, some retired, which helped to inform their characters and flesh out the world in which they worked.

Annie and Tommy, reveal the writers, are both based on real people that they met during this process.

“All of them went through that initial period of being trained in a protective kind of casing of a police college and then suddenly had to transform that onto live duty,” shares Patterson. “It’s particularly interesting in Northern Ireland, because you carry a gun as a normal cop, so with that comes greater responsibility in many ways.”

In 2019, the BBC commissioned a pilot and the first writers’ room, with the broadcaster giving the series the greenlight based on the work that came out of that process “pretty quickly.”

“With these things it almost feels like an age, but actually no it wasn’t, it was a short space of time, it was greenlit and then suddenly they needed a lot more scripts,” laughs Patterson.

Once the pandemic hit, however, the writers’ rooms moved online, with Lawn noting that they continued to work “surprisingly well” and hailing writer Fran Harris, who wrote episode three and co-wrote episode four of the series, as being “really helpful in so many ways in terms of story.”

The show creators add that they “love the writers’ room process” and believe that there “should probably be more of it in British TV.”

“Obviously it’s kind of expensive, but we find that we always come out of that process with something better than we would have had just the two of us,” says Lawn.

Act two – Riot prevention

Once the series entered production, there was, of course, the usual balancing act to play between vision and budget.

“We never compromise ourselves in the first drafts. We just splurge it all out there, everything we could ever dream of and then when the producers come back to us and say that’s probably unachievable, then we start accommodating that,” says Patterson.

“At one point we had written a riot scene,” explains Lawn: “And you know what, if we get another season, we will come back to that –

but there were certain things that you need; so many extras and such scale. You really have to cut your cloth to the budget."

Patterson adds: "There was good reason that we had it in the original script, but with the right team - and that includes the producers interrogating the need for things - you [can see] in terms of character beats we don't really need that in this character drama."

"Could we have afforded it if we really needed it and sacrificed other things? Of course, but in the end it wasn't really needed."

Directing the series is Gilles Bannier, whose recent credits include ITV shows *Trigger Point* and *Marcella* and Sky Atlantic's *Tim Star*.

"Declan and I always say that the script is a prototype; the director needs to birth it and bring it to life and you essentially hand over your vision. There is no better man that we could have handed over to," praised Patterson.

"Gilles is just a consummate director who's done some amazing shows, but he really understands Belfast. He's filmed here before, he spent a lot of time here and it really takes someone that really wants to understand this place, because it's very easy to judge Belfast, the world's been doing it for generations."

This understanding was essential to the writers, who describe the city itself as another character in the show.



Siân Brooke (above) and Katherine Devlin (right) portray Grace and Annie – their characters were both based upon real Northern Irish police officers

"We've always dreamed of making a show in Belfast and *Blue Lights* is a distillation of everything we've learned from living here and being journalists here. We think it shows the city in a way that's never been shown before in terms of the bad and the good, the kind of vibrancy of it and the problems of it," explains Lawn.

"There's no greater test than making a show about that your hometown – because we have to live here after the show goes out – so there's nowhere to hide," jokes Patterson. "This place really kind of stands on an acerbic wit, it really defines the city."

"We've seen shows really get that wrong, like over-egging it a lot of the time - people don't talk like that. We knew we would literally be hauled over the coals, not only by our peers, but our families, if we didn't do that justice."

Act three – The right side of the law

One huge vote of confidence for the series came from the police themselves, with Lawn revealing: "We showed a couple of episodes to a couple of cops recently and they said it's the most realistic portrayal of the job that they've ever seen."

"That was very gratifying for us, because we put a lot of work into keeping it real down to the tiniest minutiae. To get acknowledgement from them was very important to us."

Obviously, being a show about response police officers, a lot of time is spent following the characters in their cars. Patterson shares: "Everyone talked about the car as being like the office - that's where a lot of the camaraderie and the love is born. You're literally living in 12-hour shifts sitting beside someone, so there's nowhere to hide if you don't like each other."

"The car became this really interesting precinct, not an easy one to film by any means; they had to push the boundaries in terms of using pod cars and things - hats off to Gilles and to Stephen Murphy, one of the DPs, for finding a way to retain that energy and drive, whilst filming in an urban environment that has speed restrictions, even for film crews."



Again, this facet received a thumbs up from the genuine officers. "The cops that watched the first two episodes said it felt real, the sounds and everything, so that was a big tick for all of us that we managed to pull that off."

As the show prepares to go in front of international buyers, the creators suggest its appeal rests in the "great universality" of its themes, coupled with its "slice of life" view of Belfast.

"Everyone at some point has been in that situation - the minute you walk into your first new job - where you wonder if you are going to sink or swim. There's a great universality to that," says Lawn

"But it is a hyper-local show and I think that international audiences like that. That we have a show that is very much of contemporary Belfast is actually a selling point." **TBI**

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A clash of Rings and Dragons



With HBO's *House Of The Dragon* and Amazon's *The Rings Of Power* battling it out for the epic fantasy throne, Mark Layton explores the stakes riding on these two big-budget shows

Once upon a time, two US content giants both launched prequel shows that were part of epic fantasy franchises, within the same two-week span.

One of the shows was handed the largest budget of any TV series ever, while the success or failure of the other would have major consequences for a network facing dramatic transformation.

With Amazon's *The Lord Of The Rings: The Rings*

Of Power and HBO's *House Of The Dragon* going head to head, will they both live happily ever after?

Money talks

The long-awaited *The Lord Of The Rings: The Rings Of Power* launched on Amazon's Prime Video last month, with this journey into J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle Earth now the most expensive TV series in the world.



With a production budget of \$465m for the first season alone, coupled with \$250m spent on securing the rights from the Tolkien estate to make the show, this freshman run comes to an eye-watering total of \$715m. That's more than \$89m per episode for season one and Amazon is just getting started. The show's five-season commitment is anticipated to cost Jeff Bezos' firm more than \$1bn by the time it is done.

Few companies could afford to spend such a large sum

on a single show, but for Amazon, primarily a tech and e-commerce giant that made close to \$470bn in revenue last year, that investment is just a drop in the ocean.

Tolkien is very much the forefather of epic fantasy around the world and there are few IPs as strong as his Middle Earth to fill the gap left behind after HBO's global hit *Game Of Thrones* came to an end in 2019.

When you can afford the best, you get the best, and with audiences crying out for more big budget epic

House Of The Dragon (left) and *Lord Of The Rings: The Rings Of Power* (right) are two of the most expensive TV series in the world



fantasy, this \$1bn investment makes perfect sense for Amazon (which has 200 million Prime members, though how many of them use the Video service is open to speculation) as it seeks stand-out content to entice customers.

The Lord Of The Rings also comes with the massive in-built goodwill and demand from both fans of the original literature and Peter Jackson's well-received early-2000s film trilogy adaptation, while reviews for the show have been predominantly positive.

At this stage, it looks like Amazon's investment could well pay off, but that could spell bad news for competing fantasy projects that don't have \$1bn to spend and are now fated to direct comparison with Prime Video's new record-breaking title.

A clash with Rings

While Prime Video is spending big to offer shows that compete with rivals such as Netflix, it is Warner Bros. Discovery (WBD) that offers the most direct competition to *The Lord Of The Rings: The Rings Of Power* in the epic fantasy genre.

To be sure, Netflix is no slouch when it comes to fantasy adaptations, currently building a franchise out of Andrzej Sapkowski's *The Witcher* series, while also acquiring rights to both CS Lewis's *The Chronicles Of Narnia* and Brian Jacques' *Redwall* novels. But it is *Game Of Thrones* prequel *House Of The Dragon* that stacks up closest in terms of audience expectation and (to some extent) budget.

Launching on WBD's HBO on 21 August, *House Of The Dragon* is the first of several planned spin-offs from George R. R. Martin's global hit, set in the world of Westeros. It too has had a promising critical reception – in-fact, streaming service HBO Max crashed for users in the US as viewers flocked in their

The Witcher (above) has expanded into a franchise for Netflix, while *Game Of Thrones* (bottom, right) set the benchmark for epic fantasy on the small screen

millions to watch the show upon release. It swiftly received a second season order less than a week after it made its debut.

House Of The Dragon's budget stands at just under \$20m per episode for its first 10-part season. For contrast, *Game Of Thrones* cost around \$6m per episode when it started out, rising to \$15m during its final season.

This admittedly still huge figure (though not Amazon huge, because nothing really comes close) may offer some consolation to other producers that such exorbitant numbers are not really required to remain competitive, if the show can continue to prove a success.

And that is key, because *House Of The Dragon* really does need to be a success for HBO. The first spin-off to *Game Of Thrones* was always going to be a big deal for the company, but it is launching at a time when WBD's new management is making huge cut backs – including across HBO Max originals teams in Europe, where much of the show is filmed.

The remaining team under Casey Bloys will, like others across WBD, be taking a quality over quantity approach to originals, making it all the more important that the titles that are made achieve greater cut through. At a cost of \$200m per season, a fantasy flop could swiftly find itself on the chopping block at the newly merged giant currently seeking to make \$3bn in cuts.

House Of The Dragon would likely have been the only show truly positioned to step into the shoes of its predecessor as the biggest – and biggest budgeted – fantasy drama series in the world, if it wasn't for that pesky \$1bn blockbuster launching on Prime Video.

Now it could be a question of just how much epic fantasy viewers want to see – and if they'd prefer their adventures in Westeros or Middle Earth. **TBI**



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Talking talent

Ron Perlman, star of *The Capture*, *Sons Of Anarchy* and much more over his five-decade career, tells Mark Layton why the best of Hollywood are moving to the small screen – and what it spells for the movie industry

The line between TV and film has grown increasingly blurred, with exploding scripted budgets and ambition leading to more A-listers making the move from the big screen to the small than ever before.

Movie star talent in Hollywood and beyond, both in front of and behind the camera, now embrace what only a handful of years ago was almost unthinkable – producing, directing and acting in series rather than theatrical releases.

It's a trend that has been accelerated by both the streaming boom, particularly with US-based global services that have deep pockets to spend on top tier talent, as well as the pandemic. Cinemas closed worldwide, talent looked for work, and movies that would once have been theatrical releases went straight or swiftly to streaming instead.

Following the talent

Ron Perlman, a veteran US actor and producer whose credits range from blockbuster turns as devilish superhero *Hellboy* to a six-season stint as outlaw biker Clay Morrow in FX's *Sons Of Anarchy*, tells TBI that this shift is nothing new, likening it to the exodus of writing talent from the stage to the silver screen at the start of the last century, and then, later, to television.

The 72-year-old has enjoyed a near half-century career straddling TV, movies and theatre and he says that right now, the small screen is looking more attractive than ever. It is where writers “dealing with the human condition” can largely be found, while the movie business has grown more about “*Star Wars* and comic books.”

Speaking to TBI at this year's Monte-Carlo TV Festival, Perlman said: “Television is taking the opportunity to say: ‘OK we can be more original than ever,’ and so the great writing started to move there. That’s all I’m looking for – interesting smart original material.

“It’s almost better than ever right now, because there’s still the same amount of talent out there pushing ideas. There aren’t quite as many venues, but the ones that are doing it are taking more risks than ever – there’s some television out there that is mindblowingly cool and original and edgy, so thank God.”

Highlighting just how fast this change has come, Perlman says: “I just did a movie called *Don’t Look Up* with the most important film maker on the planet, Adam McKay, for Netflix. That movie would have been in 5,000 theatres five years ago, but it was on Netflix. Guillermo del Toro, *Pinocchio* – Netflix; Alfonso Cuarón, *Roma* – Netflix; Martin Scorsese, *The Irishman* – Netflix.

“You go where the talent goes; if Martin Scorsese is working with Netflix, that’s where I’m gonna fucking go.”

Opposite, BBC drama *The Capture* will return to Peacock in the US next month, while *Don't Look Up*, below, brought myriad A-list Hollywood talent to Netflix

Adapting to the times

Streaming's gain, however, is cinema's loss, with the future of the traditional moviegoing experience looking uncertain after decades of box office declines. The pandemic was "the final nail in the coffin" for some movie studios in a business already beginning to "diminish" due to the growth of TV and streaming.

Clearly, cinema isn't about to implode overnight, but, as Perlman noted, it's hard not to notice that franchise extravaganzas are now dominating movie theatres. "I mean, there's a new *Spider-Man* movie every 30 minutes; there's a new *Batman* every 20 minutes. I didn't go to school to wear spandex in a movie."

Recently, Perlman joined an impressive A-list cast including Leonardo DiCaprio, Jennifer Lawrence, Timothée Chalamet and Meryl Streep – among other big Hollywood names – for Adam McKay's apocalyptic satire *Don't Look Up*, which debuted on Netflix last year.

If ever there was a clear indication that A-listers will follow the talent, even if means foregoing the traditional prestige of the movie theatre, that was surely it.

"Every fucking movie star in the world was in that movie; it could have very easily have been on thousands of screens with big premieres all over the world, but instead we had one premiere for Netflix in New York and that was that," says Perlman.

"The way the business used to function, where you tried to get as many people as you possibly could into theatres all over the world before it went to television and streaming, that's gone."

Nevertheless, Perlman remains pragmatic. "If you're a guy like

me, who is a student of history and who has a hard time adapting to change, you could get a little bit wistful about it. You can't though - if you want to keep working you just gotta keep shucking and jiving and going with the flow."

Keeping busy

As his bustling IMDb page can attest, Perlman currently has plenty of irons in the fire. The second season of BBC mystery thriller series *The Capture*, in which he plays CIA boss Frank Napier, recently concluded in the UK, with Peacock due to stream it in the US next month.

Perlman will also be back on Netflix in December voicing the Podesta in *Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio*. He is a regular collaborator with the Mexican filmmaker, having starred in several of del Toro's films including *Cronos*, *Pacific Rim*, *Blade II* and *Nightmare Alley*, as well as being directed by him in two outings as the titular *Hellboy*.

Perlman is full of praise for the Oscar-winning director. "I just enjoy watching how the world experiences his genius. Every time he releases something you see another slice of this amazing artist that's like no other," the actor says.

"His movies don't look like anybody else's, they don't play like everybody else's, they don't deal with subject matter like anybody else's. I've known that from the beginning. Watching him evolve and watching how the world appreciates him with every passing moment more and more and more is a big thrill."

As for what awaits beyond *Pinocchio*, Perlman sees plenty of opportunity ahead, whatever format or screen size that might be. "I'm in good form; I'm as part of the game as ever before and at 72-years-old – still the old vaudevillian, still slipping on banana peels." **TBI**



Word on the street

Quay Street Productions founder Nicola Shindler talks Mark Layton through the first titles to debut from her new firm and shares her thoughts on the state of the scripted industry



Quay Street Productions, the scripted firm launched last year by former StudioCanal UK boss and Red Production Company founder Nicola Shindler, is bringing its first series to market.

Launching at a “tricky” time amid the UK’s pandemic lockdown, in January 2021, the ITV Studios-backed, Manchester-based firm has since been hard at work to deliver the first project off its slate – fact-based drama *Nolly*.

Nicola Shindler was also the founder of *It's A Sin* firm Red

The series tells the true story of British TV star Noelie ‘Nolly’ Gordon, who became a national icon for her role in long-running UK soap opera *Crossroads*.

Helena Bonham Carter steps into the shoes of the actress, who held the spotlight as one of Britain’s biggest TV stars from the 1960s-1980s – until she was unceremoniously axed at the peak of her fame, without warning or explanation.

‘Love letter to TV’

Russell T Davies, who worked with Shindler on titles including *It's A Sin*, *Queer As Folk* and *Years And Years*, has written the three-part series, which explores Nolly’s most tumultuous years and the legacy of her shocking fall from grace.

Shindler tells TBI that picking *Nolly* as Quay Street’s first project was an easy decision. “Russell mentioned to me that he wanted to do this story and when Russell mentions that he wants to do something you jump up and take notice.”

Nolly was “a woman who was at the absolute pinnacle of her career and then had everything taken away from her without any explanation as to why she was fired,” says Shindler.

“It just felt like such a fascinating story on a human level and a little bit of a mystery,” she explains, describing the series as “a love letter to television as well as a love letter to this incredible woman.”

“I like things that have very strong interesting women at the centre and that’s absolutely what [Russell has] written, so it was a no-brainer for me. Then when ITV came aboard, it very quickly took a momentum of its own. Once Russell wrote it, we were in production – as sometimes happens with Russell’s shows, when the time is right then you’re going for it.”

Shindler explains that *Nolly* is an “absolutely universal story” that she is sure will appeal to audiences outside the UK, who might be unfamiliar with the star.

“It’s the story of someone who has everything and has it taken away from them and how they deal with that. It doesn’t matter if you don’t know *Crossroads*; it’s about a woman who is extraordinary and how she deals with extraordinary situations.”

Not just 'bubblegum television'

Next in line at Quay Street is *Significant Other*, a UK adaptation of Yes Studios' Israeli series of the same name.

The six-part comedy-drama started filming last month, with Shindler revealing that she "fell in love" with the original after it was brought to her attention by writers Dana Fainaru and Hamish Wright.

The series follows the story of a depressed divorcee who decides to commit suicide, but, while waiting to die, is unexpectedly interrupted by a neighbour having a heart attack – sparking a most unusual relationship.

"It's the most exceptional romcom, because it's people who are at such a low ebb of their lives and it's never too sweet, it's never inevitable. You do not know what's going to happen between these two people, because almost every interaction they have is dreadful, but you just know there is something, a spark between them that keeps you watching."

What unites these two projects, and the kind of shows Shindler is looking to make at Quay Street, is that she considers them both to be "hugely entertaining – which is massively important for what we do, and sometimes that gets forgotten – but also they are saying something, so they are not just bubblegum television."

Shindler explains: "There are things there that are important to say – with *Nolly* it's the treatment of women at that time, but also through the ages, and with *Significant Other* it's looking at loneliness and exploring how as a modern society we [live] side by side, but without ever really knowing people."

The cost of living

Nolly and *Significant Other* will both debut on the upcoming SVOD/AVOD hybrid streamer ITVX in 2023, with Shindler describing the new service as "an exciting place for us to put our dramas" - though investors appeared less positive about ITV's new digital-first windowing strategy when it was first announced in March.

Shindler believes if ITVX can establish audience loyalty with its original commissions then it can attract "both a heartland ITV audience, but also people who might not watch ITV on a regular basis," with the shows that head to the company's linear channels in the following months serving as a second hit.

Meanwhile, Quay Street has ridden out the pandemic wave, with UK TV production revenues now bouncing back to pre-Covid levels, but Shindler cautions another spectre is looming, with the country's current cost of living crisis hitting the scripted industry.

"I think in terms of budget we're being impacted

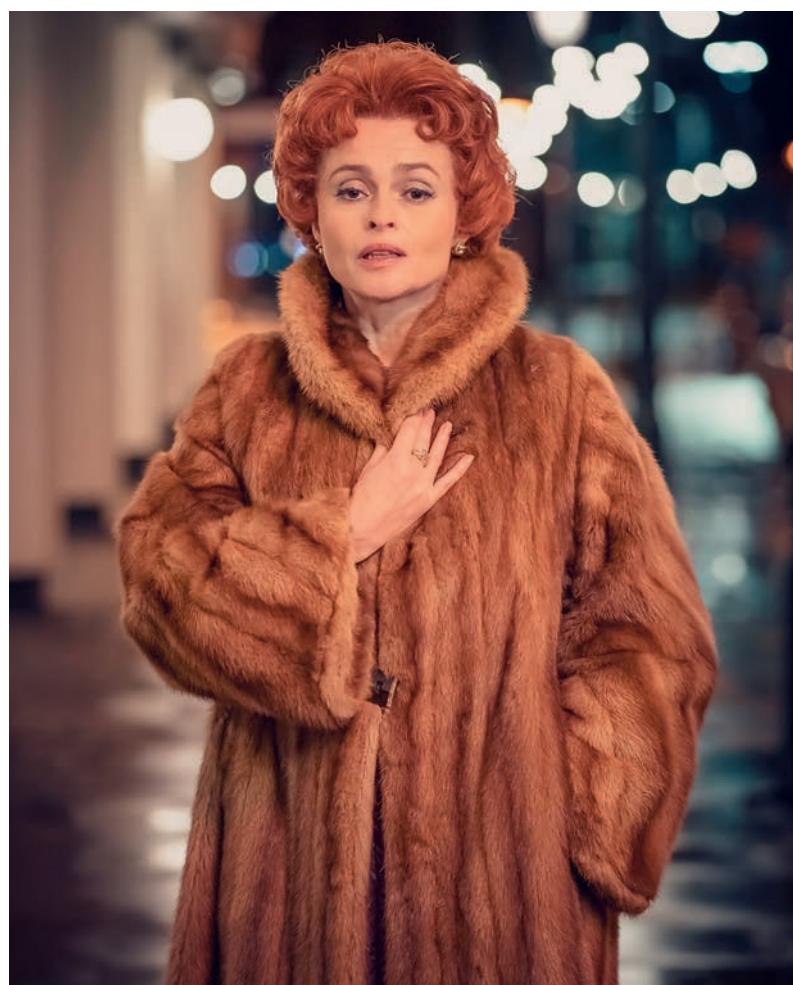
in other ways, not because of the covid backlog, but because of the cost-of-living increases. Every single thing costs more to do and make and buy, for us as well as everyone living in the UK.

"That means that our budgets are stretched a lot more and that makes it harder to make shows because the money isn't necessarily rising at the same rate as the budget."

And then, there is the ongoing issue of crew shortages. "The amount of drama that is being made makes it quite difficult at the moment, just in terms of getting good crews together and good HoDs. We've been very lucky on both *Nolly* and on *Significant Other*; we've got fantastic people in every role. But I know that out there it's scary."

There is, of course, still a big upside to this UK drama boom, notes Shindler. "People are looking for very original material and they're looking for lots of it and there isn't a desire to just put on what's already been successful in the past. From every single channel, there's 'what's next? How can we entice audiences?' and that's just brilliant for producers." **TBI**

Nolly is the first series to launch from Quay Street and stars Helena Bonham Carter as the titular British soap star



Spanish surge

Scripted talent in Spain is more sought after than ever, as global streamers and local operators tap into surging demand for drama. Richard Middleton talks to six creative talents to find out what they're watching and gets their take on their country's current drama boom



Álvaro Carmona

What has been your favourite Spanish drama of the past few years and what does it say about the country's scripted industry?

It's probably *Antidisturbios* (pictured, above), aka *Riot Police*, for Movistar+. It is a series made with great precision and care, which in other hands could have become a product similar to other things already seen - yet it knows how to preserve its own essence.

Global streamers get much of the credit for the booming international demand for Spanish drama, but are there other factors at play too?

I do believe there is a lot of Spanish talent that has been latent for years and that now, thanks to the platforms, it is beginning to become visible. I don't think there should be a competition between the two - the talent needs the platform and vice versa.



What do you make of Spain's current broadcaster/streaming ecosystem? Are commissioners still too risk averse? Are budgets constraining ideas?

I still err on the side of being romantic, but I think it's the opposite: limitation enhances creativity, not the other way around. It is true that since there is so much fiction, the budgets have to be spread out more, but I don't think that this necessarily has to be negative. And no matter how complicated it is today to cast a series in Spain, it is infinitely easier than five or 10 years ago.

Tell us about your current project and why it might be of interest to viewers outside of Spain.

Right now I'm shooting a project called *Déjate Ver* for Atresplayer Premium, produced by Buendía Estudios. I don't see much point in thinking about how the project will be received by the audience, because these things are always out of your control.

We are simply trying to make the best series possible, putting all the love in the world into it.

Nerea Castro

What has been your favourite Spanish drama of the past 12 months and what does it say about the country's scripted industry right now?

For me, *Cardo* (bottom, right), for Atresmedia Television, has been very refreshing and inspiring. The creators have made a commitment to get out of prevailing narratives and it is very encouraging to see such a good reception for a free and unusual product.



What do you make of Spain's current broadcaster/streaming ecosystem? Are commissioners still too risk averse? Are budgets constraining ideas?

There is a certain resistance to exploring some narratives. Sometimes there is a fear of getting out of the formula that has already worked, especially when dealing with large budgets. I see more freedom when the project is smaller, because there is less at stake. The natural evolution will be to take more risks on larger projects.

Tell us about your current project and why it might be of interest to viewers outside of Spain.

Mentiras Pasajeras [for Paramount+] tries to reflect characters far away from the stereotypes. We have made an effort to build complex characters who cannot be read immediately and we have focused on reflecting new family models. [Production firm] El Deseo has contributed its experience to guarantee a result that will rival international shows.

Blanca 'Blanchi' Andres

What has been your favourite Spanish drama of the past 12 months and what does it say about the country's scripted industry right now?

El Tiempo Que Te Doy (Netflix) - it has a creative commitment that is different, at a formal level. The brevity of its chapters makes it a perfect example of the famous 'less is more', a risky maxim perhaps but one that it fulfills in an outstanding way.



Global streamers get much of the credit for the booming international demand for Spanish dramas, but are there other factors at play too?

Of course! We have an outstanding level of technical understanding (despite how self-critical we are); we have outstanding actors (despite how self-critical we are); and we have an outstanding model that meets deadlines and budgets with great results (and here we are not self-critical because the outstanding result is very obvious).

What are the two biggest trends apparent in Spanish dramas right now?

Terror and teenagers!

In your opinion, what is the most underrated Spanish fiction series and why?

Ser O No Ser (aka *To Be Or Not To Be*) on RTVE Play. It is one of those small series (in terms of production) that has a very powerful message that, possibly because it was so niche, did not receive all the praise it deserved.

What advice would you give to anyone looking to work with Spanish creatives?

Never censor their chaotic creativity (especially in the initial brainstorming phase); reach a consensus with the very particular Spanish timetables (I have been Spanish all my life and those timetables kill me!); and trust us, because we are used to making the impossible possible.

Miguel del Arco

What has been your favourite Spanish drama of the past 12 months and what does it say about the country's scripted industry right now?

I really liked *Hierro* (Movistar+), *Riot Police* (Movistar+) and *Veneno* (Atresplayer). I think they're good examples of how with a good script and good production levels, we can make the local universal, like others do.





What are the two biggest trends apparent in Spanish dramas right now?

I've heard many times that [commissioners] don't want period series or films with a social theme. What the public wants is always a mystery and what the producers want is always a success. But nobody has, fortunately, yet created the algorithm to solve that.

Tell us about the most recent project you have been/are working on, and why you think it will grab the interest of the audience outside of Spain

Las Noches De Tefía [for Atresplayer] is a three-stage story about a 19-year-old boy who was interned in a Francoist concentration camp for being homosexual. He relived his story in 2004, when in Spain the Equal Marriage Law was being discussed in Congress. During the terrible nights he spent in the field, a colleague told stories to forget the harsh reality. In one of these stories, El Tindaya arises, a delirious cabaret in which everything is possible - even changing history.

Estibaliz Burgaleta

What has been your favourite Spanish fiction series this past year and what does that title mean for the Spanish fiction industry at the moment?

Tú No Eres Especial (Netflix), not only because I debuted as a creator, but also because it is a series that opens a path for youth programming in Spain. It mixes entertainment with comedy and a supernatural touch. We have also made an effort so that the characters in the series are believable teenagers, with whom the viewers can identify.

Global streamers get much of the credit for the booming international demand for Spanish dramas, but are there other factors at play too?

There are other factors, such as language, that play in our favour. A series in Spanish on a global platform aspires to the entire Spanish-speaking market and has it easier than a series in a more minority language. Also, the success of Spanish series is a consequence of what has previously been sown. Shows such as *Velvet*, *Los Serrano*, *Un Paso Adelante* - series with international success and sold to many countries before the launch of streamers.



What do you make of Spain's current broadcaster/streaming ecosystem? Are commissioners still too risk averse? Are budgets constraining ideas?

The audiovisual industry has always been very conservative, it is easier for them to bet on something that has already worked (hence remakes and adaptations) or to bet on something that is as cheap as possible. It is logical - producing a series requires a large investment. Any screenwriter is more than used to making revisions that consist of cutting costs: removing characters or grouping locations. Sometimes the platforms and production companies expect the script to solve everything - managing to be fun, agile, with lots of things happening on screen, but also to be very economical.

What are the two biggest trends apparent in Spanish dramas right now?

Youth series of all kinds, with touches of intrigue, fantasy or comedy, but aimed at young audiences. Melodrama, whether realistic and current or set in another era and with a more glamorous touch, is also a trend that is deeply rooted in Spanish fiction.

Coral Cruz

What has been your favourite Spanish drama of the past 12 months and what does it say about the country's scripted industry right now?

Cardo - it is a project that fits with a typical production trend of the moment: series created and performed by an actress. There are notable international precedents like *Fleabag* or *I May Destroy You*, but in Spain it is really an upward curve with series like *Perfect Life* and *Selftape*.



Global streamers get much of the credit for the booming international demand for Spanish drama, but are there other factors at play too?

Global platforms in Spain have greatly invigorated the production of TV drama in our country, but they are not the only reason. Knowing that you are addressing a global audience boosts creativity, but also the much higher budgets allow writers to imagine any type of story without so many obstacles. Another factor has been the long-awaited end to the obsolete format of 70-minute episodes. And finally, over recent years, we have managed to establish the figure of the showrunner - an ingredient, in my opinion, that is essential to give coherence and maximum quality to a television production with the spirit of international projection.

Tell us about the most recent project you have been/are working on, and why you think it will grab the interest of the audience outside of Spain

The last series I worked on is *Ser O No Ser* (pictured, above), a dramatic youth comedy for RTVE Play. It is the first series starring a trans teenager and played by a trans actor. It is my first series as creator, writer and executive producer. As a result of the feedback we have received through the networks, the series has already had a lot of interest in other countries, especially in Latin America. **TBI**



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Scripted Hot Picks

Our selection of the most exciting, dramatic and thrilling scripted shows heading to market

Summer Of Sorrow

Hailing from Finland, this 10-part drama was first written more than a decade ago and is set in the suburbs of Helsinki during the 1980s. It explores what happens after a child disappears from a close-knit community, as bereft local parents decide to take matters into their own hands. The story tracks how neighbourhood secrets, from the past and the present, re-surface and intertwine with a coming-of-age tale in which teenage friendship, love and loyalty are tested.

"The idea comes from a film script that the writer/director [Jani Volanen] originally wrote back in 2007 but that never got made," Fleur Wheatley, VP of sales at Keshet International, tells TBI. "It was told from the perspective of a young boy as he investigated a crime in his neighbourhood. Fast forward 10 years to when Jani was working at Rabbit Films and the idea was resurrected - this time as a TV drama, with just one episode making up what the film might have been." The original concept remains - a story told through the eyes of the children who are not party to the truth - but *Summer Of Sorrow* isn't a celebration of the 1980s, Wheatley adds. "The series was shot in and around a beautiful post-war

suburb of Helsinki called Munkkivuori. It's so green and peaceful there, that when Jani used to cycle around it, he'd always think 'there's got to be something wrong happening here'. That's why he chose it as the setting for this mystery drama."

Telling the story from the kids' points of view provides a unique perspective but also created challenges, not least how to ensure it was an authentic representation of what they might be thinking and how they might be acting. The resultant show came about because of the writing and directing, says Wheatley. "As you watch the series unfold, you'll notice that the scenes with the parents only happen when children are present, so they can see or hear what's happening. But there is a lot of misinformation and many misunderstandings as they try to work out what's going on."

At its heart, the show is a coming-of-age drama with children at its centre, but the parents' reactions "bleed over into all of their lives," Wheatley says.

"Once this missing child part of the story is resolved, it becomes old news for the children and they just move on, returning to their lives. We'll have to see what is next for them in season two."

Producer: Rabbit Films

Distributor: Keshet International

Broadcaster: Elisa (Finland)

Logline: A tale of one fateful summer, seen through the eyes of the children at the heart of a terrifying mystery



Top
Pick





Last King Of The Cross

This Tim Roth-starring series is from Mark Fennessy's recently launched indie Helium Pictures and is set in the "decadent, crime-infested, but very sexy district of Kings Cross in 1980s/90s Sydney," as the prodco's founder puts it to TBI.

Greenlit by streamer Paramount+, it follows John Ibrahim's rise from a poverty-stricken immigrant with no education, no money and no prospects, to Australia's most infamous nightclub mogul in Kings Cross: a mini-Atlantic City, barely half a mile long with every form of criminality on offer. The show is based on Ibrahim's best-selling autobiography of the same name and Fennessy tells TBI that he assisted in

recreating the authenticity of the era, "along with the many colourful characters who populated The Strip." To do that, the area was built from the ground up in a car park in western Sydney. "We populated the set with literally hundreds of extras bringing The Strip to life in an authentic way - from street walkers and the homeless, to the Bikies and the Silvertails on a night out." The international appeal, Fennessy says, lies in the show's ambition.

"*Last King Of The Cross* is epic in scope and operatic in tone with a brilliant mix of characters and a thrilling and multi-layered plotline which delivers a big, bold event series that audiences will find gripping," he says.

The show also provides a contrast to other recent shows to emerge from Australia, which have employed "the usual backdrops of Bondi Beach and the harsh Outback." It is this, Fennessy adds, which makes it "an attractive, different proposition for audiences, many of whom will have visited Kings Cross at the time or since then, giving them a personal attachment to the series."

Producer: Helium Pictures

Distributor: Cineflix Rights

Broadcaster: Paramount+ (Australia)

Logline: An operatic story of two immigrant brothers – one worshipped by his father and the other scorned – who organise the street but lose each other across their ascent to power



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The Crash

A shocking tale based on true events, this series begins when a Boeing 747 flying to Tel Aviv crashes into two jam-packed residential high-rises in the suburbs of Amsterdam. The show, set in 1992, explores how the Dutch government's claims that the plane was only carrying perfume, flowers and computer parts almost escaped scrutiny, until people started to fall ill and presented facts that didn't add up.

The show was created and written by Michael Leendertse (*Turbulent Skies*), directed by Lourens Blok (*Boy 7*), and co-directed by Edson Da Conceicao (*De Sterfshow*). Fleur Winters (*Heirs of the Night*) produces and tells TBI the drama was researched for more than a decade before it came to screen.

"The crash and mystery surrounding it always stuck with [Michael] during film school and when he read an article between journalists Vincent Dekker and Pierre Heijboer, how they worked together to ensure the people living in the area needed to be heard, he knew he had his story. He contacted Vincent Dekker and

they became very close. Both Vincent and Pierre are two of the three main characters in the show."

Journalists, rescue workers, ambulance personnel, victims and politicians were interviewed for the series, which used VFX to recreate the accident itself.

"The crash is essential to show because first, it is what sets the larger investigation in motion and what drives the series. But second, and most important, the fact that you as a viewer feel and see the impact of such a horrible disaster, makes you immediately understand the victims. The power of storytelling means you can choose which point of view of your character you want to show to understand their starting point, their challenges and join them on their journey."

Producer: Big Blue

Distributor: StudioCanal

Broadcaster: NPO 1 / KRO-NCRV (Netherlands)

Logline: A political thriller based on the true events of one of the most controversial disasters and biggest cover-ups in Dutch history



TBI Television Business International

The image shows two smartphones side-by-side. The left phone displays the TBI website homepage with a large image of an eye with a red '2' in the iris. Headlines include 'Netflix confirms 'Squid Game' return' and 'Ex-Warner Bros. distributor launches Former Bros. consultancy firm'. The right phone displays the TBI Daily newsletter with the same eye image and headline, along with other news items like 'Switzerland prepares for 'Lex Netflix'' and 'Paramount+ unveils European launch plans & Indian joint-venture strategy'. Both phones have a dark background and are set against a teal gradient background.

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The Best Of Us

Producer: Quad Drama, TS Productions

Distributor: APC Studios

Broadcaster: France Télévisions

Logline: When a local athlete is found dead, his village is in shock. But as the investigation into his murder expands, his status as a hometown hero gradually crumbles

This crime thriller hails from France and has been written by Lucie Prost, Aurélia Morali (*For Sarah*) and Isabel Sebastian (*The Intern*), with Floriane Crépin directing. It tracks the death of a local star athlete – Abel Guérin – who is found in a snowy field with a bullet in his head. However, once the initial

shock over the apparent murder subsides, the story rapidly gathers pace after a young police captain - Awa - ups sticks from the city in an attempt to solve the case, peeling back the truth about Abel and his entourage.

“Appearances, or the need to get rid of them, lie at the heart of the show,” explains Emmanuelle

Guilbart, joint-CEO & founder at distributor APC Studios.

“Awa’s mission involves piercing through these preconceptions from the outside, in a small village where everyone knows each other.”

Family bonds are central to the show’s dynamics, Guilbart tells TBI, while Awa is haunted by her own brother’s death, so she can relate to the loss of a loved one. “The victim’s family, including the overbearing mother to the three siblings, suffer from torn ties and unfulfilled expectations, which can only remain swept under the carpet for so long.”

The show’s atmosphere is enhanced by its setting in the wintry French Alps, while international audiences will quickly pick up the “well-paced ‘whodunit’ series”, which also offers “an assortment of characters, who all seem to each be hiding their own secrets.”

Marie Antoinette

Producer: CAPA Drama, Banijay Studios France, Les Gens

Distributor: Banijay Rights

Broadcaster: Canal+ (France)

Logline: The story of the incredibly modern and avant-garde young queen, who goes on to defeat the enemies of the Versailles court with courage and dignity

Deborah Davis (*The Favourite*) is behind this eight-part drama that looks to tell the lesser-known story of the French queen, who was barely 14 years old when she left Austria to marry the Dauphin of France.

Played by Emilia Schüle (*Ku’damm 56/63*), the show tracks how the stubborn young princess attempts to navigate the rules of the French court, establishing herself despite rumour and gossip circulating behind her back.

Louise Ironside (*The Split*),

Avril E. Russell (*All on a Summer’s Day*) and Chloë Moss (*Run Sister Run*) are also attached as writers, with Pete Travis (*Bloodlands*) and Geoffrey Enthoven (*Children of Love*) directing.

Simon Cox, EVP of content & acquisitions at Banijay Rights, tells TBI that the show is “arguably the most comprehensive story of the life of Marie Antoinette to date,” using Davis’ experience on *The Favourite* to create a rounded, textured portrayal.

The show has been shot on locations including the Châteaux of Versailles, Vaux-le-Vicomte, Lésigny, Champs, Voisins, and at the emblematic studios of Bry-sur-Marne, adding to “the authentic, rich and sumptuous feel of the series,” Cox adds. As for international appeal, the reasons are varied, he adds.

“Tales of kings, queens and heirs to thrones have always intrigued and entertained audiences worldwide.

“But this series twists this slightly, telling the story through the prism of Marie Antoinette herself - a female perspective not usually taken in storytelling in this genre.”





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The Swarm

Producer: Schwarm TV Productions, Intaglio Film, NDF IP, Bravado, Viola Films

Distributor: Beta Film, ZDF Studios

Broadcaster(s)/streamer(s): ZDF, France Télévisions, Rai, (Italy), ORF (Austria), SRF (Switzerland), Nordic Entertainment Group, Hulu Japan

Logline: Engaged by an oil company to conduct a biological survey, a professor of marine biology discovers a destabilising ice worm threatening the continental shelf

A truly international show from the get-go, this one has broadcasters and streamers from across Europe and Asia already attached, along with Frank Doelger (*Game Of Thrones*). Fittingly, the story straddles the globe, exploring what happens when the world's oceans start exhibiting strange happenings.

Setting out to solve the issue is a marine biologist, who discovers a destabilising ice worm threatening the continental shelf and then

puts forward his belief that an intelligent life force, dwelling in the Arctic Ocean, has borne witness to man's destruction of the seas and has decided to drive humanity to extinction.

The show is based on Frank Schätzing's 2004 novel, also called *The Swarm*, which went on to sell 4.5 million copies in Germany alone and was translated into 27 languages. The series, meanwhile, has been shot around the world, from Svalbard to Newfoundland,

from France to South Africa.

The sets were built in different regions of Italy with the support of production designer Julian Wagner (*Tribes Of Europa*) and VFX supervisor Jan Stoltz (*Fear The Walking Dead*).

Alongside Doelger on the production side is Marc Huffam (*The Martian*) and Ute Leonhardt (*Killing Eve*),

while the cast includes Cécile de France (*The New Pope*), Alexander Karim (*The Lawyer*) and Leonie Benesch (*Babylon Berlin*). At its core, the series is a punchy - and timely - environmental thriller that explores what could happen if we continue to disrupt and dismantle the ecosystems that make up the world around us.



Nolly

Producer: Quay Street Productions

Distributor: ITV Studios

Broadcaster: ITV & ITVX (UK)

Logline: Helena Bonham Carter steps into the shoes of the inimitable Noele 'Nolly' Gordon in this affectionate and heartbreaking portrait of a forgotten icon



Helena Bonham Carter leads the cast in this affectionate and heartbreaking portrait of a forgotten British icon, which has been written by *It's A Sin* scribe Russell T Davies.

The series tracks the life of Noele 'Nolly' Gordon, who became a huge star in the UK for playing Meg Richardson in ratings smash, *Crossroads*, between 1964 to 1981 until - at the peak of her fame - she was suddenly axed without warning or explanation.

"Nolly was the most famous TV star of her time, yet she is mostly forgotten and her story is extraordinary," reveals Nicola Shindler, exec producer and CEO of Quay Street Productions, which is behind the fact-based drama.

"She was a powerhouse. The first woman ever on colour TV, a TV producer in the 1960s when that was extremely rare for a woman, invented British

daytime TV, the first woman to interview a British Prime Minister. The list goes on," Shindler tells TBI.

"The story of how she was sacked and then forgotten feels incredibly important at a time when we are re-evaluating the treatment of women in work by powerful men."

Shindler adds that Nolly's real-life story was "so extraordinary with such dramatic twists and turns" that there wasn't "the need to invent more than a single beat of the story. It was inherently dramatic and entertaining. Of course, Russell has shaped her real-life experiences to fit our three-part series but barely invented anything."

Augustus Prew (*The Rings Of Power*), Mark Gatiss (*Sherlock*) and Richard Lintern (*Young Wallander*) also join the cast, portraying real-life stars of the era.

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