



Scotland the Brave

Donalda MacKinnon discusses the crucial role to be played by BBC Scotland to represent better the vast diversity of the UK. A solid base has been established to enable BBC Scotland to produce more



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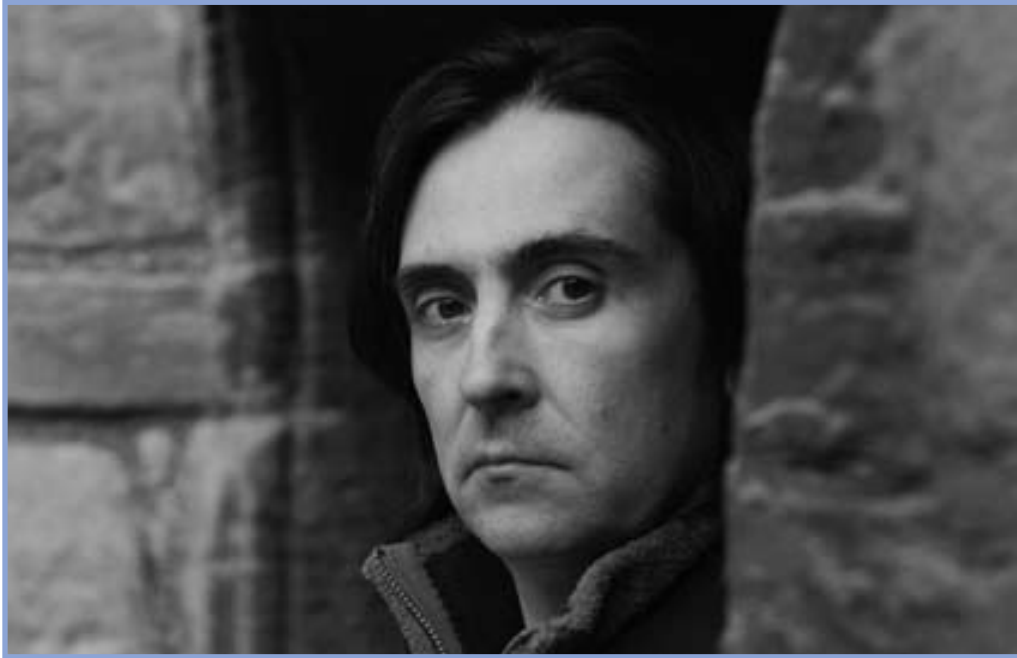
quality content for a network audience while also continuing to make high-quality programmes for audiences in Scotland by tapping into the country's great reserves of creativity.

BBC Scotland will have a crucial role to play in the BBC's plans to represent better the vast diversity of the UK as a whole. Indeed, all our production centres must be confident and able to take full advantage of the growing opportunities being made available. For its part, BBC Scotland has already been taking significant strides in producing more content for network television, in the process cementing a fine reputation in particular for factual programming. The next stage is to step up this output in terms of quality, quantity and variety.

When I took over at BBC Scotland with my job-share partner Maggie Cunningham, there was a clear belief that the weight of BBC network output emanating from outside London was too small. Our immediate aim was to lay a foundation that would see more network content being produced by both BBC Scotland and independent production companies north of the border. This groundwork has established a solid base to enable BBC Scotland to increase content suitable for a UK-wide audience across a number of platforms and genres.

Our plans incorporated a concerted effort to alter fundamentally the working culture across BBC Scotland by encouraging

Opposite: Life of Riley



A History of Scotland

greater cohesion among all teams in all units. This has already been made easier in Glasgow thanks to new headquarters that have brought an immense variety of personalities and teams together under one roof. However, with expanding media centres across the country in places such as Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Inverness, it is an ongoing process to translate that collaborative ethos across the whole of Scotland.

We are continually looking to provide leadership that will galvanise the whole of BBC Scotland towards producing more quality content for a network audience while also continuing to make high-quality programmes for audiences in Scotland. In Glasgow, for example, we hold fortnightly meetings that bring together the heads of all departments: radio, television, Gaelic, drama, comedy and entertainment, news, sport, children's and factual. It provides a regular opportunity to discuss how we can realise all the potential from our Scottish stage and consistently deliver real value. Departments that would not have a great deal of contact with each other under normal circumstances can contribute to a discourse of

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individual ideas and plans, allowing different areas of expertise to enhance a spirit of active co-operation that can be of benefit to all.

The sitcom *Still Game* was an example of how an idea emerged and subsequently grew from one platform to achieve wider success on another. Created by Ford Kiernan and Greg Hemphill, the main characters of the sitcom began life as a sketch on a radio show and were developed and honed both on radio and as a live performance before being featured on Kiernan and Hemphill's sketch show, *Chewin' The Fat*. *Still Game* fleshed out the characters further and a successful six-series run began in 2002. The first three series were aired on BBC One Scotland before its popularity saw the final three series broadcast nationwide on BBC Two, completing an intensive and successful development process.

BBC Scotland must always be looking to create content that will be of sufficient quality for a network audience by sensibly using all available resources to pilot and develop new talent. In the case of comedy, there is a strong commitment to nurture the best of network radio talent with the long-term aim of delivering something different and new to network television.

A further example of this co-operation between different

Overleaf: *Still Game*



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units is a project that began in 2008 called ‘Scotland’s History’. BBC Scotland has established a well-deserved reputation as a centre of excellence for factual programming and this particular collaborative effort has produced impressive results across a number of platforms.

At the heart of the project was the television series *A History of Scotland*, which took a fresh approach to the subject and purposely exploited all the wisdom and knowledge available from different sources within BBC Scotland. Although originally a BBC Scotland commission, it was also aired by BBC Two in January 2009, becoming one of the channel’s top performing programmes in the process. The second part of the series is currently being prepared, while radio series and an ongoing online facility make it a truly multi-platform experience.

It is particularly pleasing to consider the success of the ‘Scotland’s History’ project, because this was the type of series that may in the past have been seen as too niche for a broad UK-wide audience. In fact it reaffirms the BBC’s commitment to provide programming that better reflects the multitude of opinions, beliefs and life experiences that exist across the nations. The secret is not just subject matter; it is making that subject interesting and using the finest talent available to produce the very best and imaginative content possible.

For some time BBC Scotland’s commitment to factual programming, particularly science and history, has been a mainstay of its network output. Independent producers in Glasgow include Tern TV (who have an essay in this book) and IWC who produced the programme series *Mountain*. There are also companies which have a London base that are building on Scottish roots by setting up shop in Glasgow – such as Shed who create the dramas *Waterloo Road* and *Hope Springs*, Lion making *Homes under the Hammer* and Mentorn who produce *Question Time*. More recently there has been growing

emphasis on the arts, with *The Culture Show* and the Edinburgh Festival coverage in particular acting as consistently effective torchbearers. However, while it is perhaps inevitable that different production centres become renowned for particular areas of programming – Bristol for documentary and Wales for in-house drama, for example – no area should be limited in its scope.

Independent production houses in Scotland have a long and impressive track record in drama that rivals Wales’s more recent successes and BBC Scotland will continue to work towards its own targets in that department. Comedy and entertainment are equally important areas to explore and expand. Sitcoms in particular have always been a difficult territory but we have recently delivered two series to network – *Life of Riley* and *The Old Guys* – that reflect the confidence and faith that has been building in the quality of BBC Scotland productions. Factual programming may always be seen as our distinct specialism, but our aim must



The Old Guys

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be to capitalise on achievements in comedy as well as our accomplishments in drama (such as 2008’s *God On Trial*) to attain genuine growth across all genres.

As a country full of diverse interests and wonderful peculiarities, Scotland certainly has the scope, capability and talent to produce programming across that whole broadcasting spectrum. The artistic community covers all manner of disciplines from writing to visual arts to theatre. The Edinburgh Festival is an event famed worldwide, the Edinburgh Film Festival enjoys similar recognition and the National Theatre of Scotland has flourished since its launch in 2006.

BBC Scotland has already enjoyed a fruitful partnership with the National Theatre of Scotland, producing a documentary and recording a performance of their much-admired production of *Black Watch*. Indeed, our remit must be to tap into these great reserves of creativity the country possesses in just such a manner to offer the best possible entertainment to audiences in Scotland and beyond. ■

Donalda MacKinnon grew up on the Isle of Harris before studying at Edinburgh University. After an initial period as a teacher, she embarked on a career at the BBC in 1987 that encompassed a number of disciplines in both television and radio including current affairs, children’s, factual, entertainment and music. Returning to her roots, Donalda was appointed Head of Gaelic in 1997 and added Head of Children’s Programmes to her portfolio in 2002. In 2005 she became Joint Head of Programmes for BBC Scotland with Maggie Cunningham. When Maggie decided to leave the BBC at the beginning of the year, Donalda took over the role full-time.

