

Transcript
**Q&A Writing for BBC Television at Liverpool Everyman Theatre as part of the
Everyword Festival of New Writing
Friday 25th July 2008**

Kate Rowland (KR): This evening's session is an open conversation between the panel, and I'll just introduce everyone: Hilary Martin who's the new Development Executive of BBC TV Drama North, Daisy Coulam, writer, and Ellen Taylor, writer and producer.

The BBC is totally committed to working with writers at every stage, and we are always on the lookout for new talent. What's particularly exciting about the new Drama North department being here is that there are greater opportunities opening up in the North and there is real commitment to making work up across the whole North of England. So I'm going to start by asking Hilary to say what their vision is for the North. Hilary was previously in the commissioning team at Sky, produced the series **City Lights** at Granada and script edited **No Angels**, **Linda Green**, and **A&E**.

Hilary Martin (HM): First of all, we're very excited to be here in the North. Both of us have moved up to Manchester full time and we feel very excited that the BBC has given us the opportunity to make fantastic television here in the region. And as I'm sure you all know there's a big BBC building being built in Salford in two years' time and I think the BBC feel very strongly that they'd like to have a Drama presence in the region. In the past a lot of things have been filmed here, but they've not necessarily been developed here right from the opening stages, and I sometimes think that writers from the region feel short-changed - directors get work and the crews get work, but it still feels like the voice of the North isn't represented. And that's what we're here to do. We have backing from people high up in the BBC that we are here for the duration and have time to turn strong ideas into commissionable programmes. We're a very small team at the moment, it's just me and my boss Phil Collinson and we're very busy trying to generate a development slate that reflects our taste and hopefully will find success within the BBC schedules. We've currently got a wonderful luxury, which feels frightening and brilliant all at the same time, of having a clean slate with which to fill projects.

KR: And have you been asked to do anything specific, in terms of the region?

HM: To get us started and give us a presence in the region Phil is currently co-executing a weekday 9pm series by a brilliant northern writer Debbie Horsfield which was originally developed by Manda Levin in the London Drama Department. This is provisionally called **The Choir Project** and is filming in the next few weeks out of Manchester, so that helps us say hello. There's also another project, which is why Daisy and Ellen are here tonight as well, that I joined in the early stages of development and feel very passionate about, a BBC3 series called **Mirror, Mirror** which is hovering around a green light tantalisingly at the moment. It is twelve half-hours for the first series, but they hope it will grow if it's successful into a long runner for the second. So it would be a very, very important commission for our department, and would be something which we feel would be a brilliant place to grow newer voices in the region and give them screen time and provide an opportunity to get to know them, build relationships with them and then haul them in development on their own projects. Those are our later stages of development projects, and behind that we've been given a blank slate which we're currently filling. In terms of what we're looking for... I think it's fair to say that each department reflects the tastes of the people that are working in it. Phil and I worked together at Red Productions in Manchester on **Linda Green** and I'd say that we share a taste in television. Our total

best prize would be to get a BBC1 9pm popular series set in the North and filmed in the North off the ground. We also feel very excited about opportunities at BBC3 for the post-watershed big series. So what we're really pushing towards is trying to find these new channel-defining series that are loved by their audiences. As you all know though, these are also the hardest thing to get away as the idea needs to be very special to demand that amount of screen time. So, we're keeping our eye on that being the end goal, but also remembering that it's all about the writer's vision and so just going out there and meeting the northern-based writers, finding if there's a relationship that we feel is productive and fruitful, and finding out if there are stories you want to tell that we want to watch on television.

KR: And can I ask, as I'm sure writers in the audience would want to know, where does your commitment lie in terms of the writer, the 'Northern Voice'?

HM: Well we're here for that reason, we're here for the long-term to be able to build a relationship with the writers of the North, we feel very passionately that it's under-represented on screen. I think everyone remembers **Cold Feet** as being a fantastic series based in Manchester. It feels like the BBC have a lot of London-based shows with some would say 'pornographic' kind of directing style - zooming down the Thames in **Hotel Babylon** for example - and that's fine, it's our capital city and very filmic and helps create a strong identity for that show, but I also feel that there are other places in the country than London and this needs to be reflected on screen. Manchester is a fantastic city, but also within an hour's filming time we have Liverpool, Leeds, York, even the Lake District. We're wanting to find projects that get that out there. I think it's going to take time for people to trust us and know that we're here to stay, and I feel very strongly that we'll build a relationship with the Writers Academy and with the writersroom and in conjunction with them be going to the theatre, be going into the universities and finding people who are passionate and have stories to tell and feel they can have a home with us. We won't exclusively be working with Northern writers - I think of the incredible talents I've worked with the last ten years of my career, I'm not going to give up on them just because they live outside the area - but our primary focus will be harnessing the talent in the north of England.

KR: So talking about the Writers Academy, I'd like to ask Daisy, who has been a script editor, was on the Writers Academy, all the big continuing Drama shows, a little stint on **Lark Rise to Candleford**, and Lead Writer in the development of **Mirror Mirror** which we'll come to in a moment. Daisy, do you want to just tell us how you got into writing?

Daisy Coulam (DC): I started off as a runner in a production company, and then I got interested in the script editing side of things, so moved into that department on **Where the Heart Is**. Once you're on one show you tend to move to another, so I did **EastEnders** and **The Bill** and a few others, and then luckily on **Family Affairs** I got the chance to step in and do some rewrites. I sent off for the Writers Academy and was very lucky to get on it. Basically the Writers Academy is a course for writers who have either written a play, or done a bit of television, but haven't really got on the ladder to being commissioned all the time, so you get that chance. You do a three month course, then you do a script on **EastEnders**, **Casualty**, **Doctors**, and **Holby**, and then after that if you made a connection with any show then they'll keep you on. So I've done that and managed to stay on **Casualty**, so that's what I do at the moment.

KR: Once you're in the loop, does everything go swimmingly? Because you had a difficult experience...

DC: Yes. I got the sack.

KR: You got the sack?

DC: Yeah I did. Basically I got into **Casualty**, and I was excited about doing that, and then I got offered an episode of **Lark Rise**. It all seemed to be going swimmingly - then I just got more and more confused, and more and more lost in what they wanted from me. I think they lost confidence in me, and I lost confidence in myself and then I got the call. So I've been writing television drama for a year and a half now and that's been my experience.

KR: I want to ask Daisy, what do you want to do as a writer? What do you want to say as a writer? Because that original voice is what everybody has here, everybody offers something distinct, what is it you want from your drama?

DC: What do I want from my drama? What I really want is everyone to write like **The Wire**! I think what I'd like to see is shows being a bit more complex. What tends to happen on British shows is that the good people are good and the bad people are bad and that's it, that's the definition. Not to harp on about **The Wire**, but what that does so brilliantly is, everyone's got a bit of good and bad in them.

KR: And Ellen, you've been both writer and producer and you're still doing both.

Ellen Taylor (ET): I'm still doing both.

KR: Which is quite unusual.

ET: Which is quite interesting, at the moment. I've been on both sides of the fence and I found it a useful place to be in a way. One of the things about television and the BBC – particularly in more recent years, partly because of John Yorke and the Writers Academy – is that they are trying to put writers back at the heart of shows and developing new drama. I know Hilary feels exactly the same that the tide is shifting a bit, because I think traditionally a lot of Producers haven't respected the roles of writers enough. If you're a big, top, famous writer who comes to them with your big series idea, then it's like "Yeah we love you", but for writers getting onto the process and working on those big, established series, it's sometimes difficult to get respected and a lot of writers I think are kind of chewed up and spat out. It's not always been pleasant, and that's why I think it's nice to know that Daisy's also had that experience, but it doesn't mean that you're not going to get on brilliantly on other shows. And having been on both sides of the fence, I would like to say as a producer I think it helps me work well with writers and I actually think the two things can go hand in hand you know. They do it a lot more in America than they do here, which I think is always a good thing.

KR: So Ellen, do you want to talk about **Mirror, Mirror** and what the process has been, how it started, where you are now. I think the complex situation you are in is quite interesting for people who don't know about how the BBC commissions – why has it taken so long?

ET: I'll pick up on what Hilary was saying before about what people want from a show. Basically BBC 3 wanted a Teen series, so as an in-house team, we were asked to put forward various pitches for different series ideas, and one of them was a hair and beauty academy in Manchester and that was an idea that'd been floating about back from the **Cutting It** days and had just got sort of forgotten and lost. So

out of this meeting of four ideas, they liked three of them, I went away and developed two ideas, one was for the kind of **Shameless** Teen thing and then there was this one. They made the decision that this was the one to go with, I was given hair and beauty in Manchester, kids, teenagers and that was it. Daisy I knew before as a writer I really respected, who has a really good, contemporary voice, but with real warmth, which I think is her strength. And, we kind of got in a room with another Manchester writer called Ian Kershaw and other young writers who hadn't developed a new show before. We said "Right, lets come up with some characters, let's come up with some story-lines," and we did it like a group of writers sitting round a table. And it was really good and we all got really excited and it felt like a proper organic way to develop a series. And what was great is that Daisy's obviously the lead writer on the show, but everybody will now write an episode and everybody feels like they're part of the show. And it's great, and yet it is young writers, nobody who's had their own show before, writers who have just had a couple of episodes on the big shows, one writer who's only ever written one episode of Torchwood, an episode I happened to read, and thought that's a really original voice. So it is true that there's lots of ways in, but sometimes that one script we find on our desk we go "Brilliant, lets meet them."

KR: So you brainstormed?

ET: We brainstormed, we got the Bible, you first get the script, submit them all, everyone goes "Yeah, Great! Lovely, we love it, it's brilliant" and you're going "Hurrah, so now we just make it yeah?" (laughs) Ah no. So then we get notes back from commissioners, and you go away and you revise them, and then I also got my budget and thought "Whoops think I'll have to cut a few characters out, they're going to die, not got enough money for them." And then we kind of look at the show in the light of the first set of notes and then you go back again, and then you get more notes. And then basically the closer a show gets to having a green light, and they have to put the money on the table, there's lots of people involved in the process who have ideas about what the show should be, and put their stamp on what the show is, and it's quite difficult to hold your nerve, to hold your idea of what the vision of the show is.

HM: In a brilliant twist of fate, I think today's come at a really good time for us, because we're absolutely at a point now where the Channel Controller is thinking about it being this big long series and so therefore is asking whether it should tell its stories in a soap style from the off whereas our Drama Commissioners seem keen for it to launch as a one-off series that does really well, everybody loves, and then we come back for series two and say "You loved it so much, here you are" from the same characters, from the same precinct we've grown a soap. So they're very different thoughts and we're in the middle of this discussion. But we've come up here today for this festival and as a brilliant byproduct we will get some time together to talk and actually remember what the show is, all the things that we love that stay constant within both those ways of telling stories ie the characters, the precinct, the tone, the identity, the theme of transformation. We're just going to make sure we know what we think before we go back into the meeting with the bigwigs. I'm sure from this conviction the show will come a mutually satisfying way forward. Fingers crossed anyhow!

ET: And it's a problem where you as writers have to hold onto your vision of what you're saying, and your vision of what your thing is, but bear in mind once your piece goes into development - whether it's a **Casualty** script, or your own single drama - it is immediately part of a bigger process, and everybody will have ideas about what it's going to be, and it's a balancing act. We're like a big team doing the same balancing

act as you're doing on an individual basis, this is my vision, these are my characters, this is my story, but also taking on board everybody else. It's a juggling act, and it doesn't get any easier in time does it?

KR: I think a lot of you will know a writer called Stephen Butchard, local writer, who's just fantastic, he always talks about the ABC, the Art, the Business, the Craft, he always does it in that order -

ET: That's quite a wise saying

KR: It is wise. You have to juggle all those things. I'm going to open up to questions now.

Q: The BBC used to be renowned for strong, sometimes controversial dramas, sometimes even subversive like **Boys from the Black Stuff**. I don't see any of that on television now, especially on the BBC, it all seems to have gone. If I'm not interested in writing soaps, if I want to write stuff that's got an edge to it, would it be received? Would it even be looked at? Would it be considered?

KR: The question is, is the BBC ever going to be running scared of controversial, political, challenging Drama? I think just to mention a couple, **Criminal Justice** the other week, I'd say **The Street**, I think the writers there are dealing with big issues.

HM: I'm new to the BBC, I've only been here three or four months, so I've been asking a lot of questions to the Commissioners, and trying to get a feel for what each channel represents, and what it means and what slots are available and I think they feel that they've got a very strong boundary fence around BBC2 as somewhere to protect for opportunities for exactly things like that to be made. I think they make 12 hours a year of which several are singles, and there's the season of White Britain recently with **White Girl** at the middle of it, which I thought was fantastic. I can see it's frustrating that sometimes there are more slots available for other types of areas, but I think the BBC feels very strongly that they know they've got a public remit to fill and they need to cater for a lot of different tastes.

Q: All I'm saying is, if I could be bothered to write something, is it going to reach someone? Are you going to just look at it and say "We can't really deal with this"?

KR: No. Can I just say for anybody who sends a script into the writersroom, we are not censoring subject matter, it's on the talent of the writer, what we see in that script, we're looking to develop the writer, so we will not be being judgmental about content.

Q: I remember when **Canterbury Tales** was on some time ago, where the characters don't carry on from episode to episode necessarily. It's quite difficult to present a series like that, how'd you think that's best done? Would anybody be interested in that sort of thing?

HM: Absolutely as a viewer I am. I think **Clocking Off** was and **The Street** now is a fantastic opportunity for writers to be able to tell their own story without having to pick up from the week before. I think the reason why there's not millions of them on television is because of expense in terms of filming, you don't have the same set each week, you don't have the same location, so it's got to be something that's joined together and therefore demands space in the schedule. But I think that **The Street** has really proved there is still a thirst for anthology series. It's about finding a territory or a theme or a set of characters that has a contemporary, zeitgeist take on it

that means it can win through. This all comes back to the writer's vision and telling the stories that you want to tell as this is where the sharpness of focus will lie.

ET: I think it's just about making sure that what's great about **The Street** and **Clocking Off** - to make it a series and not just a collection of individual things – is that there's a really strong thread that does tie in all those things together. Obviously with a series you're pulling people back with something, every week, so if it's not the hook of what happened to X character, then you have to work extra hard because obviously series are expensive and you need to know that your audience can connect with them.

Q: How does the BBC judge success in drama? Is it in terms of numbers? Quality?

HM: Well, there's two answers to that, and one is obviously ratings, and ratings you know are exciting, if it does well you know that a lot of people have enjoyed something that a team behind it has believed in. But there's also something called AIs, which is not Artificial Intelligence but Audience Indicator (I think!) which charts how much the people who have watched it have enjoyed it rather than just the numbers. So I'd say BBC monitors its success by enjoyment of shows.

Q: I've just graduated from University and want to start being a writer. Are there any jobs in TV for me?

DC: I would say script editing is your best way in, or people sometimes get in as researchers for different shows. Script editing is brilliant because you're working alongside writers, and you learn a lot from them, and also you learn a lot about structure and storytelling so you're kind of learning on the job really, and then you can just lunge your way in. That is the best route I would recommend.

ET: I know so many writers with totally different ways in, and backgrounds. In terms of as a writer, whatever background you come from, I personally think that the big, continuing drama series are a brilliant way in for a lot of writers, they really are for a lot of different reasons, a lot of them run shadow schemes like **Hollyoaks**, **EastEnders** does. They're really good because you get people reading your scripts, it's all about getting your work read.

KR: The other thing I'd say is, what's unique about the BBC is the amount of Radio Drama, and some of the best writers in the business have done it. Paul Abbott did his work with Radio Drama and then **Coronation Street**, and it's about the single-authored piece, it allows writers a degree of freedom, and there is much more of writers moving between mediums, they'll do theatre, they'll do radio, Tony Marchant's about to do a brand new radio piece, they'll do television. So you don't have to think about one, singularly, either. So have go at everything.

Q: Are you at any one time looking for a certain kind of script or a certain subject matter?

HM: No. I think it's just very important that you send us what it is you want to write yourself. I think, obviously, it's wise not to operate in isolation to what's on Television at the moment, so things like **Bonekickers** having just recently been on, **Being Human** having just been recently recommissioned for BBC 3 - probably **Vampires** or **Archaeologists** they're not going to commission in the near future. Obviously the point of development is getting stuff made, and getting it on screens, but equally I just feel sometimes if you know a writer is writing what you want, if they're second-

guessing or it's not what they want to do, then it's not as good as when it comes from the heart. So that's where you need to write from.

KR: Can I just ask you if you were looking for writers for **Mirror, Mirror** and you were reading a whole pile of scripts, what would you be looking for in those scripts?

ET: Well that's the thing, of course with writers that have the right sort of voice for your particular project or series, and certain writers that don't. I don't think Jimmy McGovern would be right for **Mirror, Mirror**, and I'm in no doubt that he's a fantastic writer. **Mirror, Mirror** particularly, the tone is light, and fast, and young and funny.

HM: And joyful.

ET: And joyful, you know, so a writer who had a brilliantly gritty darkness in their voice, just wouldn't be right for the show. I know if the writer's got the right tone for the show, and each show is very different. It's no reflection on being a good writer or a bad writer, it's just how your voice fits with the tone of the show that your working on.

HM: And often you've been impressed by their talent, but not quite sure whether they're right for the show, and so we have sent them Daisy's script and our Bible and the conversation very quickly becomes about the fictional world, and actually sometimes they can have quite left-field ideas that get us thinking in a new way, and then we think "Oh yeah we want you!"

Q: If I was a 65 year old applying to the Academy, given the complexity of the application form, would I be wasting my time filling it in? And if not, why is the age on there?

KR: When we say new writers are we meaning young writers? In terms of the Academy now, I've just had a phone call from somebody that's just got onto the next Academy and she's mid to late 40s and been writing for years and years and years and years.

HM: And to be honest when you read a script, you don't have a writer's age with it

Q: Then why put it on there in the first place?

KR: What's unique about the Writers Academy is, it is a proper training opportunity and it runs through BBC recruitment, so it's the same process that will go for all BBC jobs, and that's why they have all that information, which they do for every single BBC job. It's just about monitoring, the age does not affect the decisions.

Q: On the Writers Academy, it feels as though there's an inherent contradiction in writers writing what they love, and then doing **Doctors, EastEnders, Casualty**, which a lot of writers don't have any real fondness for.

ET: Well I think that there are different ways in. Some writers who are very lucky get their original work and their original voice and a script hits the big time immediately, I'm just saying that for a lot of writers, those shows were a really good stepping stone, if you look at say Matthew Graham, Ashley Pharoah, the **Life On Mars** guys, Tony Jordan, they all started as **EastEnders** writers.

DC: It's tricky because you are given a story line, you can't really deviate from it because obviously if you do then, serial story wise, you're bugged really. I suppose

EastEnders is a bit more tricky, something like Casualty you can bring your own stories to it and you create the 'cast of the week'.

HM: I do think it's a valid point and that the most satisfying thing for you as a writer is to be able to have your voice shine through, and if that means you don't fit into those four shows then yes you're right that's a stumbling block, and you shouldn't necessarily water it down just to do that. It might be that if your voice isn't suited to that you're also not going to be picked for the Academy, but I think it's just one way of doing it. I know Phil and I will be coming to see as much theatre as we can, and we're going up to the Edinburgh festival this time round to catch the fringe, maybe theatre is a route that's more suitable to you.

KR: I think the other thing just to say about the Academy as well is the opportunity to write on these shows, and to write big themes and deal with difficult issues, whether it's schizophrenia or whatever and reach eight million, to do that as a writer is fantastic. You are also having a conversation with the department, you are talking to producers, you're talking about your own work and ideas, so two things are happening in parallel. And there are the Matt Greenhalghs who wrote **Burn It**, that was his first thing ever, and then he went on to write **Control**, there are writers doing other things as well.

Q: The Writers Academy lasts three months, Monday to Friday, 9 to 5?

DC: Each week is structured around a different thing, it might be structure, or it might be character, so then you sit down, you'll have a classroom, literally lectures, or you'll have guest speakers. We had Ashley Pharoah, Tony Jordan, big writers who are incredibly experienced, come in and talk about their experiences of writing. You have tasks set for you, so you'd have to go home and write twenty pages of something. It's very structured.

KR: And just to say, you are paid around £400 a week, and also now people who don't live in London are paid their expenses, which they didn't before, so it's made it much much fairer. It's a really rigorous training period, and then you get the commissions after that.

Q: You touched on budget briefly - would you be looking at something with the kind of budget of **Dr Who**, or would you be looking at lower?

HM: It's absolutely project-specific, so we're not going to be paid any less because we're in the North, we're competing for slots essentially and then the budget is decided dependent on the scripts. But I think also there's only enough money in the pot for a certain number of **Doctor Whos**. So for example the commissioners are talking about next year and a lot of their budget is used up by projects they've already commissioned, but they've got a certain pot of money left but quite a small pot of money. So I'm thinking of putting ideas forward for which are very lounge and dining room orientated! Seriously though, I'm trying to find lower budget projects as well as high end so if there is only a small pot left they might still be able to fund the lower budget pieces if the script and idea is right.

ET: You save a huge amount of money if you have a lot of volume, basically all in one area, and you've got set-up costs, say it's **EastEnders**, or **Doctors** is incredibly cheap because they do so many episodes and they have this wonderful set that's all in the University in Birmingham, and everything's all very set up and they can make an enormous amount of episodes very very cheaply. **Doctors** for instance can be made for under fifty grand an episode which is...

KR: Unbelievable

HM: And the other extreme of that is **Doctor Who** which is a lot more than that because of special effects and CGI and for the amount of people that it takes to do all that, but I guess the reason that would feel value for money is there is an afterlife for **Doctor Who** in terms of sales to other countries, merchandising etc. Which is another reason I guess why a series is the holy grail for Commissioners whereas a single happens and then it's gone.

KR: And an hour of radio drama, just to give you the other extreme, is between 20 and 24 thousand.

Q: In terms of trying to gear up a kind of Northern writer's club, is writersroom being adapted to take account of that? Scripts that you feel are good scripts, are they being then sent up here to be looked at?

KR: Can I just introduce Katherine Beacon who a lot of you might know is the Project Manager for Writersroom North. Some of the best writers working with the BBC at the moment, and on the Academy have come through Writersroom North and are feeding in to every part of BBC Drama and we have very key relationships with the key theatres Live Theatre, West Yorkshire Playhouse, Everyman, we are working on the ground all the time and there are a lot of different schemes.

HM: And Katherine and I are going to make sure, when we get a little more settled, that we get meetings every few weeks so there's a flow of information between the two departments.

Q: Back to the point about of your vision and staying true to what you write, at what point does it cease to be yours as a writer and belong to the project? At what point are you not able to take the ball home and say "Sorry, you're not going to change it that much, you can't have it anymore"?

HM: Well I can only speak for myself really and I can't answer for every producer within the BBC, but for me writers are absolutely at the heart of it, and I feel to a point if something goes into production that as a script editor, as a producer, and now in my new role, that it's about actualising their vision. Quite often I would be on the phone to the writer checking out a casting idea. A lot of BBC shows have writers as executive producers, but equally I think it's about making sure in the relationship at the beginning that you both like the same idea and that throughout the process you continue to feed off each other, so it's collaborative just by default of the relationship.

ET: But say you're commissioned to write say a **Lark Rise** or a **Casualty** or whatever, and I'm saying this with a producer hat on as opposed to a writer hat, nobody wants writers to fail and writers to be taken off episodes, but there sometimes does come a point where what the writer wants to do, and what the producer does, differ. And on those shows there comes a point when actually the project owns you.

KR: There was a time when I was at the BBC where I thought the BBC is not writer-friendly, and I would be having conversations with writers and understand the frustration and anger - but it is different now, it really is, and it's just better for the programmes that writers have more ownership.

Q: When a script arrives at the Writersroom, how much does personal taste go into that? Do you assess purely on writing or do you look at what the content is?

KR: In terms of what they do with that script, if I just explain the process, we look at the first ten pages. What's unique about the way we work is that all our readers come in together and they sift, so they read the first ten pages but they're sat in a circle. If they feel that it's not for them in terms of taste, content, or they're not feeling very funny that day, whatever, they will pass it to another reader, they will always give the benefit of the doubt, if they're wavering it will get a second reading there and then in those first ten pages, before it either goes in the returns pile or full read. We're very very careful about that. With the majority of scripts that we receive, the likelihood of that script being made is minute really, very very small. We are looking at writer talent. Just to give you one example of a writer Paul Farrell, who sent in an unsolicited script, as we call it, that was fantastic, that got him onto a training scheme for Crime serials, there were nine writers who pitched to the Exec Producers of **Waking the Dead** and **Silent Witness**, he got commissioned by **Silent Witness**, he then got commissioned by **Waking the Dead**, is now writing **Primeval**, he still uses the same script as his calling card, and he knows it's not likely to be made, but it's doing him a lot of favours. Because it's who he is as a writer.

Q: If he's got a calling card script that he takes around and does the job for him, but it would never be commissioned, why if it's so good would it never be commissioned?'

KR: I'm sure Paul's asking that! I think there's an interview with him on the website. It's a two-parter, it just might not fit - when they make a single drama or two-parter, they want high-impact event pieces, so it just might not fit what they're looking for, but it's not to say it will never be made, sometimes things come around don't they?

HM: **Life On Mars** took seven years.

ET: Seven years, famously.

KR: So things can take a long time. But he's also writing scripts, writing big strong dramas, he's writing 120 minutes of drama which is enormous, you know, big stories, and he's doing what he wants to do. Sometimes I would say to writers, I use the word calling card script, you do need a script that says "This is me." There's been a lot of radio dramas that have come through the unsolicited script system, fantastic dramas that have been produced almost as they came in.

ET: I'm working with a writer called Jamie Mathieson, who used to be a stand-up comedian. He wrote this script, his first script, which got picked up (and it's the script that I read) by BBC films, which has now been made and is just about to get a theatrical release. So you just never know, sometimes it does happen, literally. It's called **Frequently Asked Questions About Time Travel**. It's one of the funniest scripts that I've ever read, I couldn't put it down, and it's his first script! I think it can happen for everybody.