

Written evidence submitted by Andy Harries

I am the Chief Executive of Left Bank Pictures one of the leading and most successful drama production companies in the UK. (The Crown, White Lines, Outlander etc). I have worked in the industry for over 40 years and made many TV shows for the BBC. These range from arts documentaries (Arena and Omnibus) as a freelance producer/director in the 1980s, to producing to major award-winning comedy shows like Caroline Aherne's Mrs Merton Show and The Royle Family in the 1990's when I was Head of Comedy and Drama at Granada TV. Most recently at Left Bank we have produced 4 series of the BAFTA winning drama Wallander with Kenneth Branagh and the powerful single film Sitting in Limbo which aired in June this year which dramatised the shocking story of Anthony Bryan one of the victims of the Windrush immigration scandal.

The survival and long-term good health of the BBC is of the utmost concern to me.

Over the last few months we have witnessed how vital a job the BBC does in shaping the agenda when the country faces a crisis like Covid-19. The BBC has always been brilliant in a "war". It is freely available to everyone and it feels dependable, well balanced and reassuring. But the value of the BBC is far greater than just the depth and professionalism of its excellent and impartial news service. The very nature of British society has been - and should continue to be - shaped by the choices of its programming on both radio and TV. Programming that should reflect of our ever-evolving society and be aimed primarily at nurturing and developing our unique culture. The BBC guarantees that there is a nursery slope for British talent. The BBC is our cultural beacon. It's the shop window for British talent in all its form and that includes, for example, all our comedians, writers, actors and musicians and the world class technicians behind the cameras who make our shows. British talent - British tv shows - British production companies and British culture - punches above its weight right around the world.

Why are British actors from Dame Judi Dench to Kenneth Branagh to Helen Mirren so admired around the world? Where do world class comedic talents like Phoebe Waller Bridge, James Corden and Ricky Gervais first develop their routines and persona. Where do our extraordinary dramatists with worldwide reputations like Peter Morgan, Sally Wainwright, Jed Mercurio, James Graham, Steve Knight and Jimmy McGovern - people with real "voices" - learn to write. Why is British music from the Rolling Stones to Coldplay and Adele and Amy Winehouse to Stormzy, and Dave so successful around the globe. The answer is simple - all this talent has been able to rely on the BBC at some point in their career playing a part in their development and promotion. We have all grown up with the BBC as an essential part of our lives and there seems no reason at all to change this. It's not rocket science. If it ain't broke don't fix it - and the BBC charter's aims are more necessary and more valuable now - than ever before!

All my experience and all my instinct tell me that the BBC must be fully funded. It's must be able to offer a full range of TV and radio shows and to continue its extraordinary role at the heart of the creative industries in the UK. Without a strong and relevant BBC this sector, which is one of the most important and vibrant sectors of the UK economy, will be in danger of real decline.

Who else is going to guarantee to maintain and develop the culture of the British and the unique cultural framework that we work within? Who is looking out for the UK in the new world? The streamers like Amazon, Netflix, Apple and Disney are already providing us with lots of additional programming to watch and some real and new opportunities for production companies like Left Bank but their priority is their own bottom line. They will always cherry pick the UK talent to suit their needs. Their agenda is not ours. Their concerns are concentrated on their global franchise - not

the nurturing of the next generation of British writers and acting talent. We cannot rely on them anymore than we can the commercial companies like ITV and Sky. In good times all these companies can provide much benefit to the UK but in less good times they may not be there for us.

My pitch to you as an experienced UK producer is this - the BBC is part of the very fabric of what make us British and keeps us British. And it's the broad role and influence of the BBC that keeps the flag of British culture flying around the world. When we gave up our empire in the 20th century we left the world with the lasting legacy of our language. This is what keeps us relevant and global and the BBC in all its forms is a very key part of this.

As for the future funding of the BBC:

We need something simpler and less subject to endless political interference. The funding should be removed from the political football pitch. So, I would abolish the licence fee. Most people watch or listen to the BBC on digital devices. If it is called anything it should be a Digital membership or better still be a digital log in.

I think the BBC should be funded by direct taxation. Every taxpayer or everyone in a tax paying household should have the right to watch or listen to the BBC for free. The figure for the service should be agreed and linked to inflation and guaranteed for 15 to 20 years. The iPlayer - which will become the real home of the BBC in the next decade or two should operate like a Netflix account. If you are a tax pay resident and citizen of the UK, the BBC should be free- if you are not a tax player and/or living overseas you can pay an annual fee.

The BBC need confidence and support. It is like the NHS - it's just a part of being British. It's time to accept it, embrace it, support it and of course improve it. There is always room to make the service more efficient and more inclusive. No one wants a dull and worthy BBC - no one wants a cash poor service than looks like a remnant from a pre-digital era. The BBC must compete for our attention and for our continued support. This detail is for another occasion but what is important is that the BBC is modern, balanced, independent and that its puts as much of its income as possible into production and on the screen. But my message to you is straight forward.

We must value, cherish and develop the BBC and not diminish it.

Andy Harries OBE.