

ARTS Film

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confident 1980s female wrestling comedy Glow, and Jodie Whittaker silencing protests about a female Doctor Who with a deft new take on one of television's oldest characters.

Finally, there was the rebirth of Queer Eye, unexpectedly at the front line of the culture wars, delivered with such charm that everyone from rednecks to cops melt at the Fab Five. Almost impossible to watch without blubbing. Even reality TV had heart this year.

POP

Dan Cairns

David Byrne's audacious live show touched down in Britain twice. A bare box of a stage, shorn of equipment, leads, microphones – just a dozen musicians, barefoot and in matching grey suits, their instruments hanging from usherette-style ice-break straps, and lighting that emphasised the inventiveness of Annie-B Parson's synchronised choreography. Oh, and music – stretching way, way back into the depths of the Talking Heads songbook. At the Hammersmith Apollo, it was spectacular. Perhaps more impressively, when the show was performed at the O, Arena, in London, it seemed scarcely less intimate. My highlight(s) of the year.

Another unforgettable evening: in the West End, where Marianne Elliott's bold gender-switching update of Stephen Sondheim's Company was a triumph, with Rosalie Craig sensational in the lead role and Patti LuPone irreplaceable. The lows? Warbling, whimsical school-of-Sheeran wimp-folk. Enough, please. And enough, too, of Carpool Karaoke: for crimes against music, not to mention look-at-me ubiquity and self-basting smugness, James Corden is in a class of his own.

THEATRE

Christopher Hart

Stephen Karam's weird and moving play *The Humans* was a triumph at the Hampstead Theatre. It was simultaneously a blackly comic family drama, a spooky supernatural foray into the characters' subconscious and an unforgettable state-of-the-nation portrait of America today.

And there were two superbly revived classics. *Translations*, at the National, directed by Ian Rickson, was as fine a version of Brian Friel's perhaps greatest play as you will see. It first appeared in 1980, and Friel's theme of small, spiky, "backward" and "inward-looking" cultures being flattened out to make way for the great juddering trunk road of economic



Memorable: David Morrissey as Mark Antony at the Bridge Theatre

hyper-growth is even more relevant now than when it was written.

Julius Caesar at Nicholas Hytner's Bridge Theatre was terrific. It was also, unavoidably, about the distinctive 45th POTUS, without being hampered by the sort of strangulated loathing evident in most theatrical approaches to the Donald Trump phenomenon. Instead it explored the heart-thumping appeal of the demagogue who cuts through complexities with a handful of thunderous slogans, while Ben Whishaw's dithery intellectual liberal, Brutus, wanting to persuade the electorate through reason and argument, proved utterly impotent. Memorable, to say the least.

CLASSICAL

Hugh Canning

The centenary of the death of Claude Debussy was celebrated by British orchestras, and especially by Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla's City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra – its festival of his great orchestral music included a concert performance of his only opera, *Pelléas et Mélisande*. A stage production of that seminal 20th-century work at Glyndebourne looked, on paper, like one of the events of the year, but the acclaimed Stefan Herheim's production proved another of Glyndebourne's exercises in navel-gazing, setting the entire opera in a replica of the organ room of the old house.

Glyndebourne's director, Sebastian Schwarz, departed after launching the opera house's first singing competition, the Glyndebourne Opera Cup. He will be replaced by Stephen Langridge. It will be a couple of years before we see the outcome of this appointment.

Antonio Pappano finally ended speculation about his departed: he will be taking a sabbatical from the Royal Opera in 2020-21, when he was due to leave, but will return until 2023 to give the board and management time to find a successor. He will be a hard act to follow, as he reminded us with his superbly conducted revivals of Verdi's *Macbeth* and Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. Elsewhere in London, Vladimir Jurowski winds down his regime at the London Philharmonic, leaving a second job vacant. Edward Gardner might be an ideal candidate.

DON'T MENTION MY DAD

John David Washington is finally emerging from Denzel's long shadow, says *Helena de Bertodano*

When John David Washington was 11, he told his father, Denzel, that he would never consider acting as a career because "your shadow is so big". Denzel asked him if he had ever heard of Kirk Douglas. "No," John David replied. How about Michael Douglas, his father said. John David's face lit up. "Yes!" Washington Sr told his son to look up Kirk Douglas – and finally the penny dropped. "I understood what he was saying," Washington Jr laughs, "but it didn't matter. To me, my dad was different."

In John David's eyes, no one could come close to Denzel. Michael Douglas may have outgrown Kirk's shadow, but John David didn't even want to try to emulate his father, who, by the time his son was 11, had won an Oscar for Glory and been nominated for his roles in *Cry Freedom* and *Malcolm X*. He spent years running as hard as he could in the opposite direction, determined to make his name as a football player and getting as far as the NFL (the professional American football league). "But then," he says in mock exasperation, "I started reading, 'Denzel Washington's son makes NFL', 'Denzel Washington's son is ranked nationally among the top 100 players in the country'. Not John David, but 'Denzel's son'. I was, like, 'Damn, there's really no escaping it.'"

He flirted with the idea of changing his surname to Pearson, the maiden name of his mother, Pauletta, also an actress. Eventually, injury forced him out of football and he found the perfect segue into acting – which he had always secretly longed to do – with the comedy series *Baller*, in which he plays the fun-loving Ricky Jerret. Now, at 34, he has been nominated for his first Golden Globe as best actor for his extraordinary performance in Spike Lee's *BlackKkKlansman*, based on the true story of an African-American cop who impersonated a white supremacist and infiltrated the Ku Klux Klan. Of course, once again the headlines are "Denzel Washington's son just earned a Golden Globe nomination", and "30 years after dad Denzel, John David Washington reacts to his own first Golden Globe nomination".

Having read that Washington is shy and touchy about questions concerning his father, I have fairly low expectations when we meet at his publicist's office in LA. In fact he is relaxed and forthcoming, with a big, booming laugh. Wearing a black T-shirt, ripped beige jeans and high-top Yeezys, he talks enthusiastically about not only his career, but also his family,

describing his father as "the coolest man I know". I tell him – truthfully – that when I first saw *BlackKkKlansman*, I hadn't realised he was Denzel Washington's son. "Cheers to you!" he says happily.

Perhaps his easy-going demeanour owes something to a new-found self-assurance. He has a cluster of films in cinemas now or coming out soon, notably *Monsters and Men*, in which he takes on another racially charged cop role – but in a wholly different key. Where *BlackKkKlansman* roars, *Monsters and Men* quietly rages. It's inspired by a police shooting of an unarmed black man, and Washington plays a cop "with a strong moral compass" who faces a dilemma over the conduct of a colleague. The tension of the movie is never more palpable than in the close-ups of Washington's face. "It's like a lasagne of emotion," he says of the role.

In the opening scene, his character – who is off duty – is pulled over by a white cop in what is a clear bit of racial profiling. Washington is no stranger to such treatment: he says he has been stopped countless times, once when he was driving a Jaguar rental car. "I'm running late for an audition for *Baller* – it was my first time reading with [the director] Pete Berg, so I'm nervous already. I'm not rushing, though. But I'm in character and Ricky is an out-loud guy. I'm listening to rap music, pumping it real loud, I've got my seat laid back, a tank top on, I'm looking maybe kind of gangsta, and the police pull me over. They say, 'You know why we pulled you over?' I'm, like, 'No, officer.'"

At that moment, an urgent call came in and the police threw his licence back at him, off to fry a bigger fish. "I made my audition on time. I was just thinking, 'What were they about to tell me?' I didn't break any laws. Black guy in a Jaguar, I think that's what it was."

I ask if he is ever tempted to drop his father's name in such circumstances. "No," he says categorically. "I don't want them to say, 'Guess who I pulled over?' Denzel's son. Now I can call TMZ. I'd rather keep it quiet and let them give me this ticket that I don't deserve."

He plays a third cop, albeit a small role, in *The Old Man & the Gun*, with Robert Redford. To prepare for all three parts, he accompanied Brooklyn police officers on ride-alongs. "The worst thing I saw was a guy bleeding out [after a shooting]. What struck me was how calm everyone was – the victim, the neighbourhood, the police. It will stay with me for the rest of my life."

The eldest of Denzel and Pauletta's four children, John David was born in LA and grew up as his father's career took off. All the attention directed towards Denzel



'I've got to be who I am': John David Washington. Below, in Spike Lee's *BlackKkKlansman*

made him withdrawn and suspicious of people. "I'm paranoid by nature," he says. "It definitely closed off some possible fruitful relationships."

Does it still affect them? "I'm single – so I guess it must. Old habits are hard to break. That might be the next step for me

“ I don't want the police to say, 'Guess who I pulled over?' Denzel's son' ”



MANUEL HARLAN

in my maturity, to be vulnerable enough, man enough, to accept a person who accepts me and sees me for me." The way he speaks makes it sound as if he's already there. "I talk a good game," he says, chuckling. "Execution is a whole other thing."

His parents' close relationship means the bar is set high. "I tell you, that's why I'm being picky," he jokes. His parents, he says, are "like aliens, unicorns" to him. What does he mean? "Just the way they light up a room. They're incredible storytellers. When we're at a barbecue and my father has the floor, it's unbelievable how well he tells stories. Every character comes to life. My mother's the same way. When I was growing up, we'd visit my grandparents in North Carolina. They would just roast peanuts and tell stories around the fire. That's where I probably got my joy for theatre. I used to get scared sometimes, the laughs would be so thundering. That, then obviously seeing my father do Shakespeare in the Park."

When he was six, he got a role in one of his father's films, *Malcolm X*, also directed by Lee. In those days he spent a lot of time on set with Denzel. "I remember Spike coming up – 'You want to be in a movie?' I looked at my mom, who said, 'Do you?' I was, like, 'Yeah.' Next thing you know, I'm in the classroom." His role was to stand up in class and say "I'm Malcolm X" in solidarity with the recently assassinated leader. "I was excited, I was through the moon about it." So excited, Lee had to ask him not to overdo it. "He kept calming me down. 'Just get up, look at the camera, say the line.' It took about seven takes."

A quarter of a century later, out of the blue, Washington received a text from an

unknown number asking him to call Lee. At first he thought it was a prank, but he dialled the number anyway. "I hear, 'Yo, this is Spike.' He goes right to the pitch [for *BlackKkKlansman*], and I'm thinking, 'Maybe this is a family favour or something – maybe he wants to get my dad to do this, and he wants me on as a producer.'"

But it was John David that Lee wanted, offering him the lead role, which he plays with graceful intensity, reigning in the anger in a manner that makes it all the more potent. He brings to mind another great actor – who shall remain nameless.

Washington no longer worries about charges of nepotism. "All the directors I've worked with have let me know clearly that this is about their belief in me," he says. He doesn't even mind when people suggest that he sounds like his father, with the same distinctively mellifluous voice. "My family even says it, so I guess there must be some truth in that. I've kind of conceded that notion, I guess. Overall, I don't want to go out of my way to [be different]. I've got to be who I am."

If there were any lingering doubts in his mind about his worth as an actor, they were put to rest at Cannes in May, when *BlackKkKlansman* received a 10-minute ovation. "I didn't expect that at all," he says, sounding emotional. "I held it together until I got in the car, then I cried like a baby. I'd never had that kind of triumph, not even in football. The winning. I think the tears represented what I wanted my whole life, [the time I had spent] hiding the artist in me. I felt that I was being recognised as John David the artist, not the son."

Monsters and Men is released on Jan 18

CORIOLANUS MEETS ABIGAIL'S PARTY

With Happy New Year, Colin Burstead, the writer and director Ben Wheatley moves beyond the bloodbath. By *Jamie Graham*

I'd been to see Tom Hiddleston in *Coriolanus* when we were doing the casting for *High-Rise*, and I didn't know the play that well – it felt alien," says Ben Wheatley, the Essex-born writer and director responsible for *Kill List*, *Sightseers* and *Free Fire*. We are sitting at a corner table in the riverside bar at the BFI Southbank, in London. "Coriolanus is very different from our modern three-act structure – the hero does all of this heroic stuff right at the start, then just becomes more undone as it goes on. So, to understand it more, I thought I'd do an adaptation set in modern times and reduced right down. Instead of armies and battles and murders, I'd turn it into a tight family drama."

The result, crafted under the mischievous working title *Colin You Anus*, is *Happy New Year*, Colin Burstead, in which the titular patriarch (Neil Maskell) hires a seaside mansion to host festivities for his extended family. A tsunami of grudges and resentments hits, many of them whipped up by the surprise arrival of Colin's estranged younger brother, David (Sam Riley).

"Ben obviously sees the arsehole in me," Riley laughs when I phone the principal cast members over the next few days. In Wheatley's 2017 film *Free Fire*, the braggadocio of Riley's hot-headed Stevo triggers an explosive shootout during an arms deal in a Boston warehouse. Maskell, meanwhile, starred in Wheatley's 2011 feature *Kill List*. He says that Colin is "essentially having a drunken nervous breakdown", and the film, like *Coriolanus*, is about male entitlement. "Coriolanus goes out and fights, then comes home and thinks there should be no democracy, and he should make all the decisions. Well, Colin thinks, 'I'm the main breadwinner, I've paid for the house – we're all going to have the new year that I dictate.'"

"I'm Colin's nephew," says Joe Cole, an actor best known for his glowering intensity as John Shelby in *Peaky Blinders*. When Cole describes himself as a film's "ray of sunshine", you know you're in for a rough ride. "I'm fun-loving, easy-going, up for a laugh," he chortles. "Everyone else is tearing lumps out of each other."

Then there is Charles Dance as cross-dressing Uncle Bertie. "Originally, Uncle Bertie was Aunt Sally," Dance says. "Ben was going to rewrite, and I said, 'Well, don't lose Aunt Sally completely. I have the feeling that Uncle Bertie likes to dress in women's clothes.' We found a cashmere half-length skirt, woolly tights and subtle earrings. The family are past the shock of it, they just accept it."

Like Cole's nephew, Dance's uncle is one of the more genteel, placatory members of an ensemble that also includes

Hayley Squires, Peter Ferdinando, Richard Glover and Asim Chaudhry; there are, in fact, 18 big speaking parts crammed into a drum-tight running time of 90 minutes. "Bertie's not past lamping somebody." Dance points out, but here, unlike in Wheatley's previous six films, the action is bloodless. Which is not to say anaemic – verbal assaults, handheld camerawork and brusque editing make for an aggressive chamber piece shot at a hired home in Weymouth in just 11 days.



Gentle: Charles Dance as Uncle Bertie

"That's longer than Down Terrace and about the same as *A Field in England*," shrugs Wheatley, a guerrilla film maker who cut his teeth on run-and-gun TV shows and now edits his features as he shoots. Colin was filmed chronologically, with the cast working until 10pm each night and Wheatley then beavering into the small hours to assemble the day's footage to rough music. It is his gonzo way – even his more sizeable, starchy productions, *High-Rise* and *Free Fire*, were shot fast and fluent.

"He's the *enfant terrible* of British cinema," Dance insists, saying that Wheatley's fierce autonomy and fiercer working methods make for an "energised" set. Three takes – one scripted, one improvised, one an amalgamation of the two – is his standard practice, and the actors' contributions are this time recognised by a screen credit that reads: "Written by Ben Wheatley, additional material by the cast."

Of course, the sometimes rough-and-ready, often confrontational (in theme and form) nature of Wheatley's work is not for everybody, meaning that his films have yet to conquer multiplexes despite garnering rave reviews. Actors such as Armie Hammer and the Oscar-winning Brie Larson queue up for the Wheatley experience. Audiences? Not so much.

"It's the weird thing about cinema," he muses. "We all celebrate underground movies in the end – they're the ones that everyone likes 30 years later – but they fail commercially at the time." So will any of his films be a part of the canon in three decades' time? He chuckles. "I have

no idea – not without sounding like a massive dick."

Maybe Colin will be the one. Not only is it sans bloodshed, which instantly widens its appeal, it is clotted with an oh-so-English social dysfunction that recalls the perennial Mike Leigh favourite *Abigail's Party*, and acts as a potent microcosm for our fractious, fractured times. Furthermore, it is guaranteed eyeballs by airing on BBC2 tonight before migrating to the iPlayer. It really is a must-see – viewers can expect to quake one moment and be in gales of laughter the next.

Yes, this might just be the moment when Wheatley pops, to use the modern parlance. And if it is not, he begins shooting Rebecca, starring Hammer and Lily James, from a Jane Goldman script, in May ("It's not a remake of the Hitchcock film, it's an adaptation of Daphne Du Maurier's book, which is darker") and is working on a six-part series of *Happy New Year*, Colin Burstead for the BBC.

"I like the characters a lot," he says, confirming that he plans to direct each episode himself. "This is an opportunity to do a six-hour version and get into all of those stories. It's this huge family saga set around the buying of a small shopping centre. I've really enjoyed writing it." And is Colin still being something of an anus? Wheatley laughs. "If *Happy New Year*, *Colin Burstead* was *Coriolanus*, this is *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* and *Othello*, all mixed together."

Happy New Year, Colin Burstead is on BBC2 at 10.30pm tonight