

Television

By Phil Harrison

Films by
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Today

Pick of the Day Life Drawing Live!

BBC Two, 9pm

Last year, this interactive art evening proved to be one of the BBC's less predictable success stories with viewers sending in 30,000 artworks created during the show. Circumstances are slightly different in 2021 but even so, this two-hour special looks likely to prompt more amateur virtuosity. Joe Lycett will anchor proceedings while Josie d'Arby (below), Daphne Todd, Lachlan Goudie and Adebajji Alade will offer various shades of encouragement.



Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing

BBC Two, 8pm

More balm for the soul from the most amiable double act on British TV. Tonight, they're in Bob's teenage stomping ground, the Lake District; moaning about rain, glorying in the scenery and discussing their favourite powdered foods. Hilarity with a delicious undertow of melancholy; simultaneously unassuming and unmissable.

Surviving Squalor: Britain's Housing Shame

ITV, 10.15pm

ITV News has done plenty of sterling work this year on Britain's appalling social housing provision. Tonight, Daniel Hewitt travels the country reporting on the disgraceful conditions endured by tenants living with damp, mould and even structural disintegration. PH

Film

Sorry to Bother You

(Boots Riley, 2018)

BBC Two, 11pm

Rapper turned film-maker Riley concocts a genially loopy provocation that very roughly resembles *Being John Malkovich* if it had been got at by P-funk maestro George Clinton. The always magnetic Lakeith Stanfield plays Cassius "Cash" Green, who struggles at his telemarketing job until he discovers the magic tool of a "white voice". Armie Hammer plays a corporation CEO, Tessa Thompson is Cash's activist squeeze, and a satire on race, capitalism and the working grind is spiked with a delirious subplot about human/horse hybrids. US indie favourites Tune-Yards and Riley's own rap group the Coup provide the music for the most irreducibly out-there manifestation of America's new Black cinema. JR

Monday

Pick of the Day Look Away

Sky Documentaries, 9pm

It surely won't be a shock to anyone to learn that the rock industry in the 1970s and 80s wasn't always a safe or healthy environment for women. But even so, there's some truly grim recollections in this documentary in which women share their stories of grooming, coercion and general mistreatment at the hands of men whose



abusive behaviour was tolerated as simply a manifestation of the rock'n'roll lifestyle. How did the music industry allow this behaviour to become normalised?



Jamie Oliver: Together

Channel 4, 8pm

Another new angle for Jamie Oliver – this time, he’s talking us through luxurious meals for post-lockdown celebrations and family gatherings. The emphasis is on pre-preparation and simplicity and the recipes look both achievable and delicious. Aspects of Oliver’s presentational style remain an acquired taste but there’s no doubting his grip on the zeitgeist.

British As Folk

Dave, 10pm

Brexit is a gift to television, allowing presenters to venture into our divided nation in search of points of agreement. In this new series, Darren Harriott, Fern Brady and Ivo Graham check the national pulse, beginning in the Midlands with a curry binge and a visit to the Leicester car park which held the remains of Richard III. PH

Film

Laughing Gravy

(James W Horne, 1931)

Talking Pictures TV, 5.20pm

Two generations of vintage comedy. First, Laurel and Hardy and the much-loved one about the dog. It was a reworking of their silent film *Angora Love*, which was about a goat, and was later partly reworked as *The Chimp*, which was actually about a gorilla. Then at 6.35pm, taking the Laurel and Hardy tradition into the 1960s, Eric Sykes’s 1967 *The Plank* stars Sykes and Tommy Cooper as two workmen milking every conceivable gag out of the titular prop, with vocal interjections and sound effects

replacing dialogue. Supporting stalwarts include Hattie Jacques, Jimmy Edwards, Jim Dale and Bill Oddie. Another Stan and Ollie great, maybe their greatest, is on the same channel at 4.40am, 1932’s *The Music Box*. JR

Tuesday

Pick of the Day

Spice Girls: How Girl Power Changed Britain

Channel 4, 9pm

A barely believable quarter of a century has passed since the Spice Girls released their debut album *Spice*. This series offers a deep dive into a phenomenon that emerged at the height of Britpop and seemed to offer both aesthetic continuity and a point of difference. But how did it happen? This opening episode explores the band’s formation in 1994. How did these disparate personalities combine to such memorable effect?



A House Through Time

BBC Two, 9pm

David Olusoga continues to turn up fascinating and heartbreaking stories centred on Grosvenor Mount in Headingley, Leeds. It’s now 1871 and the house belongs to factory owner Benjamin Wild. He’s not one of the series’s more sympathetic characters, presiding over horrific industrial accidents and harsh inequality. But with an increasingly militant workforce, a reckoning is coming...

Sixteen: Class of 2021

Channel 4, 10pm

The charming fly-on-the-wall series following the Year 11 students at Dudley’s Link Academy



continues. As we rejoin them, GCSE exams have been scrapped and grades are at the mercy of teacher assessments and coursework. There's also college applications, career confusion, and some practical experience for Jack. **PH**

Film

The Love Witch

(Anna Biller, 2016)

Film4, 1.35am

Ripely retro gender politics comedy, with a dash of supernatural frisson, from the writer-director who established herself as US cinema's queen of po-mo pastiche with 2007's sexploiter parody *Viva*. Here, Samantha Robinson plays Elaine, a witch starting out again after her husband's death, and using her love-at-first-sight spells with passionate abandon. Basing the script on her research into Hollywood love stories, self-help books and sorcery, Biller whips up glamour, tawdriness, horror camp and 21st-century feminist irony into a potentially enjoyable brew. Anyone with memories of TV's 60s comedy *Bewitched* will get the winks, but realise that this is a whole different, infinitely headier brew. **JR**

Wednesday

Pick of the Day

The Man Putin Couldn't Kill

Channel 4, 10pm

Horror and absurdity jostle for space in this fascinating doc about the 2020 poisoning of Russian dissident Alexei Navalny. At various points, the details feel almost comical – Navalny was watching *Rick and Morty* when the poison kicked in and there's a diversion involving poisoned underpants. But the story is, of course, deadly serious – the future of Russian democracy is at stake and Navalny's near-death experience is a warning to other dissidents.



Fred and Rose West: Reopened

ITV, 9pm

A grim continuation of an already impossibly bleak story as Trevor McDonald follows the police as they investigate new leads in the case of Fred and Rose West. Were their 12 known victims merely the tip of the iceberg? New technology might well reveal some answers. The locations explored include a farm and a suspicious cavity underneath a cafe in Gloucester.

Jay's Yorkshire Workshop

BBC Two, 9pm

Jay Blades's domination of primetime goes from strength to strength as this series, scheduled to follow *The Repair Shop* on BBC One, continues. Tonight, Blades meets Jez and Shane who want to thank Mr Bob, who has set up a life-saving mental health charity in Huddersfield. How will his good works be rewarded? **PH**

Film

Minari

(Lee Isaac Chung, 2020)

Sky Cinema Premiere, 12noon, 3.35am

A terrific, tender autobiographical film by Korean-American director Chung, about growing up in the Arkansas countryside. Alan S Kim and Noel Cho are the children of a couple (Steven Yeun, Yeri Han) who make their living sexing chickens, but Dad has quixotic dreams of starting a farm – which he attempts with the aid of an eccentric, talking-in-tongues Christian neighbour (Will Patton, magnificently full-on). Then Grandma arrives and turns family life upside down – and the film too, as she's played by Korean doyenne Youn Yuh-jung, in a mischievous performance that won this year's Academy Award for best supporting actress. Quietly joyous, with captivatingly immersive rural atmospherics. **JR**

Thursday

Pick of the Day

Help



Channel 4, 9pm

“Gloria’s got a cough.” On the face of it, innocuous words. But ominous in the context of a care home in 2020. Initially, this devastating drama by Jack Thorne and Marc Munden zooms in on the beautifully rendered relationship between Jodie Comer’s nurse Sarah and Tony (Stephen Graham) who has early onset Alzheimer’s. However, it widens to incorporate the crisis in the care system during Covid. Angry but full of feeling for those at the sharp end of the unfolding horror.



Patrick Kielty: Northern Ireland, The Union and Me

BBC One, 9pm

Having lost his father to the Troubles, Patrick Kielty knows better than most that turbulence around the border between Ireland and mainland Britain has potentially horrendous consequences. In this film, he investigates the Brexit-imposed trade border in the Irish Sea and talks to loyalists involved in the new wave of unrest on the island.

All Creatures Great and Small

Channel 5, 9pm

The secret of this reboot of the bucolic 1970s classic was its reluctance to deviate too much from the original formula. As a new series begins, James is facing the prospect of change as an old mentor makes him a tempting offer. But don’t be too surprised if the lure of the beautiful Yorkshire Dales remains too strong to resist. PH

Film Youth

(Paolo Sorrentino, 2015)

Film4, 1.30am

This may not be the most polished gem in the sometimes excessively baroque filmography

of Italian maestro Sorrentino, creator of *The Great Beauty*, miniseries *The Young Pope* and a forthcoming Netflix film, the autobiographical *The Hand of God*. But it’s typically crammed with gasp-inducing images, loopy energy and melancholic, if often very male, humour. Michael Caine plays a composer pondering life’s disappointments at a Swiss sanatorium, in a postmodern variant on Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain*. As well as Harvey Keitel and Rachel Weisz, there’s a bizarre cameo by singer Paloma Faith, and a brief but incendiary turn by Jane Fonda as a veteran screen queen (with perhaps a satiric dash of Faye Dunaway?) JR

Friday

Pick of the Day The North Water

BBC Two, 9.30pm

Everyone in Andrew Haigh’s Arctic whaling drama is fleeing their past – why else would they have found themselves in such a hopeless place? But redemption feels unlikely for any of these lost souls as they drift further, both literally and figuratively, from the currents of normal society. Jack O’Connell’s Sumner just about anchors things but tonight, he starts to get a very bad feeling about Colin Farrell’s monstrous Drax. Visually, verbally and emotionally sparse, and all the better for it.



The Cotswolds With Pam Ayres

Channel 5, 8pm

Who better to explore the picturesque, quaint Cotswolds region than the unofficial laureate of Middle England, Pam Ayres? This new series sees the enduringly popular poet taking in some of rural England’s most



typically idyllic sights – expect a stream of antique shops, cream teas and a perfumery that has made scents for the Queen. Don't expect anything too hard-hitting.

Young Rock

Sky Comedy, 8pm

A jaunty, endearing telling of the larger-than-life story of wrestler/actor Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson. We join him as he runs for president in 2032 (and who can realistically rule this out?) and looks back on his life. Expect teenage rebellions, money worries and early romantic angst rendered in a brisk, cartoonish style. PH

Film

Bombshell

(Jay Roach, 2020)

Sky Cinema Premiere, 12noon, 10pm

Arguably the first glossy Hollywood movie directly emerging from the MeToo movement, this slick docudrama tells the story of the Fox News sexual harassment scandal. Charlize Theron and Nicole Kidman play TV anchors Megyn Kelly and Gretchen Carlson, John Lithgow is Ailes, and Margot Robbie the (fictional) ostensibly gauche young recruit on the way up. Scripted by *The Big Short* writer Charles Randolph, the film plays cannily if schematically on its ironies: rightwing female characters embodying a liberal cause, Kate McKinnon as a lesbian working in a misogynistic and homophobic milieu. It's a somewhat glib example of current-affairs awards-bait cinema, but enjoyable at that. JR

Saturday

Pick of the Day

When Nirvana Came to Britain

BBC Two, 9.30pm

To celebrate the 30th anniversary of their album *Nevermind*, this charming film explores the relationship between Nirvana and Britain. “The UK responded to Nirvana long before America did”, says Dave Grohl. And it does seem that, from impromptu gigs in Edinburgh biker bars to swearing all over late-night telly, the band found a welcome in these isles. The doc hears from booking agents, journalists, promoters and fans the band took under their wing as it

tracks Nirvana's rise and, tragically, fall.



Strictly Come Dancing

BBC One, 7.45pm

A Saturday evening autumn ritual returns as the popular hoofing contest returns and viewers begin the task of identifying the show's various perennial archetypes (contender, talentless but lovable trier, surprise package etc). This year's brave celebrities include Adam Peaty, AJ Odudu, Robert Webb and Nina Wadia; they'll be judged by Shirley Ballas, Craig Revel Horwood and Mosti Mabuse.

Paul O'Grady's Saturday Night Line-Up

ITV, 9.35pm

The gameshow that demands self-awareness of its guests continues. Facing the judgments of the public tonight are Amanda Holden, David Haye, Aston Merrygold and perpetual wildcard Johnny Vegas. Expect the usual gentle acidity from O'Grady as the verdicts are revealed. PH

Film

Hue and Cry

(Charles Crichton, 1947)

Talking Pictures TV, 12noon

Italy had *Bicycle Thieves*, Britain had Ealing and this bracing comedy thriller set amid London's post-blitz landscape. It involves a band of East End kids who discover that their favourite detective comic is being used by crooks to hide secret messages. A brisk celebration of community, this set the tone for the Ealing comedies to follow, but its depiction of bomb-scarred London, shot by Douglas Slocombe, gives it a distinctive quasi-documentary streak. Alistair Sim plays the comic's writer; Jack Warner, later TV's Dixon of Dock Green, turns up as a bad 'un; while young hero Joe is the late Harry Fowler, who would



sustain his career as British film and TV's prime
cockney geezer right into this century. JR

