

Independents Day

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1

FADE UP:

1

CAP:

In 1955 there were 5 million television sets

And just one channel

Until...

MONTAGE SHOWING THE DEBATE ABOUT COMMERCIAL TELEVISION, HEADLINES THREATENING DISASTER, NEWSPAPERS OBJECTION TO A RIVAL COMMERCIAL FORCE ETC INTER CUT WITH SOME FIFTIES ESTABLISHING IMAGES.

Titles over.

BLACK:

CAP: The Independent Television Authority is set up to award the new franchises...

2

EXT. THEATRE - DAY

2

The doors are closed but we see posters for a Variety show advertising Harry Richman, The Duncan Sisters, Max Miller etc. An energetic balding man, smoking a large cigar, comes up to the doors and raps on the glass, Lew Grade, is almost fifty, born in the Ukraine and brought up in Brick Lane. A cleaner unlocks the door.

3

INT. LOBBY, THEATRE - DAY

3

As Lew Grade is let in, the box office manager looks up.

BOX OFFICE MANAGER

Good morning, Mr Lew.

LEW

Morning Alfie. How's the house?

BOX OFFICE MANAGER

Not even room for your Auntie.

LEW

That's what I like to hear. Have they broken?

BOX OFFICE MANAGER

He's been at it since eight o'clock this morning. There's fog at Orley so Jean Sablon hasn't taken off yet.

Lew heads for the stalls.

4

INT. THEATRE - DAY

4

On stage is a line of dancers, long-legged, high-kicking, wearing assorted leotards, hair tied back with scarves, going through a routine with geometric precision. Sitting behind the desk is impresario Val Parnell (63, a powerful six-footer with a broken nose) and next to him a stage director and two ASMs as Lew makes his way from the back of the stalls.

PARNELL

(to Director)

OK, keep Salici where he is and put the Lilliputians third, followed by Chester and Dickie to close. If Sablon gets here in time we'll switch back.

Lew sits down in the row behind him.

LEW

(to Parnell)

Have you seen Evening Standard?

PARNELL

Yes. I thought you said we were the front runner?

LEW

We were, I think that was the trouble, we were too far in front. We looked too powerful.

PARNELL

(sarcastic)

Right, so powerful that we're the only applicant for a franchise that didn't get one.

LEW

It says they've chosen three companies and are still in discussion over the fourth, so perhaps there's a chance.

PARNELL

Are we in a discussion?

Lew does not answer.

PARNELL (CONT'D)

Then it's not us. They're in a discussion with someone who isn't us. Anyway I think we're well out of it, Littler says the same.

(getting up)

Who wants to watch a little grey blob in the corner of the room when you can come to the theatre and see the real thing?

(louder)

(MORE)

PARNELL (CONT'D)

Alright, let's take it from the top,
Ladies. And this time, let's have a big
smile from everyone.

As Parnell walk down towards the stage, Lew puffs on his
cigar in the darkness, thinking.

5

INT. ITA BOARDROOM - DAY

5

A long table on one side in the centre sits Sir Kenneth
Clark (52, tall, balding and upper class) flanked by
member of the ITA selection Board. Opposite sits Norman
Collins and his ABDC Board members, 'CO' Stanley (56) a
large bluff Irishman, and City Stockbroker Sir Robert
Renwick (51) tall and pin-striped. Jackets are off, some
are smoking and all look exhausted, this has been a long
meeting.

CLARK

Norman, we need a decision. We have a
very tight schedule to maintain if we're
to be on air in September.

NORMAN

(irritable)

Oddly enough, I know exactly how tight,
because I am the only person in this room
who has actually made a television
program. It took us two years to plan
the BBC Olympic Games coverage in 1948
and you want a complete network up and
running in nine months.

CLARK

(patiently)

We need your experience Norman, which is
why we want you to accept the offer.
Please.

RENEWICK

The two weekend days in London is just
not practical.

NORMAN

Associated Rediffusion have five!

CLARK

We have worked very hard to offer each
company an equal revenue share. You will
have weekdays in Birmingham as well as
the two London weekend days. It's a fair
offer.

NORMAN

Birmingham doesn't open till next year,
and in case you didn't notice... it's
not in London!

(MORE)

NORMAN (CONT'D)

So unlike Rediffusion we have to build two of everything: two studios, two offices, two OB units.

RENWICK

It's financial suicide.

NORMAN

And I think it may be impossible in the time.

CLARKE

So you're refusing the offer?

Everyone looks at Norman, this is his decision.

NORMAN

No.

Everyone waits for his answer.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

I've fought too long for this.
(looks round the table)
I'm not giving up now.

RENWICK

We need time to restructure.

CLARKE

Take time. We'll make the announcement, there's no need to sign the actual contract until you're ready, provided you can commit to being on air on the 22nd. Agreed?

Norman nods.

6

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM - DAY

6

Lynne is dressed in black with her hair tied back. She stands in front of Gerald (55, a provincial theatre director wearing a cravat), who sits at a desk with a young ASM.

LYNNE

You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand -
Such as I am: though for myself alone - I
would not be ambitious in my wish, To
wish myself much better; yet, for you - I
would be trebled twenty times myself; A
thousand times more fair, ten thousand
times more rich;

Gerald sighs and gets up. He walks round the desk, and standing behind her, puts his thumb into Lynne's mouth.

LYNNE (CONT'D)
(struggling on)
That only to stand high in your account,
I might in virtue, beauties, livings,
friends, Exceed account;

Gerald takes his thumb out and wipes it on a coloured handkerchief with another disapproving sigh. Lynne looks shocked at the ASM, who shrugs.

7

INT. SITTING ROOM, BARNES - NIGHT

7

Lynne is sitting at a small table playing Pelmanism with her mother, Pat, in front of the fire.

LYNNE
He said I had a speech defect. It was revolting, he just stuck his thumb in my mouth. Apparently I have a sibilant 's', whatever that means, and if I want to work in the theatre I have to get rid of it.

PAT
Directors, dear, they like showing who's in charge. I had one who gave me notes entirely in French. I never understood a word, but it made him happy. Anyway, I thought you were giving all that up to write.

LYNNE
I'm not sure that two articles for the TV Times qualifies me for the Nobel prize for literature.
(lighting a cigarette)
I am doing another one, an interview this time, about the new television channel.

PAT
Somebody nice I hope?

LYNNE
Aidan Crawley, war hero, was a Labour MP, now he's in charge of the news.

PAT
Is he married?

LYNNE
Please, mum!

She plays a card.

PAT
A girl's got to think of her future.

8 **EXT. TELEVISION HOUSE - DAY**

8

The Ex Air Ministry building faces Bush House on the corner of Kingsway and Aldwych. The main entrance is hidden by scaffolding and Bovis Construction signs, visitors are directed to a side door.

AIDAN (V.O.)
Independent Television News Limited
invites applications for the post of
Newscaster...

9 **INT. CORRIDOR, TELEVISION HOUSE - DAY**

9

In contrast to the glamorous BBC, Television House feels like an abandoned building. Some discarded papers and a few bits of unlikely furniture remain. A chair has been set in the middle of the corridor opposite the stairs with a sign on it reading 'ITA News Department - KEEP OUT'. Beyond it, we see a mixed group of men and women sitting on the floor with paper and cups of coffee, among them Aidan Crawley (47, handsome, ex war hero, pioneer documentary maker and the first ITN News Chief), News Editor, Arthur Clifford (30, large cheerful Eastender).

AIDAN
(dictating)
The job involves helping to prepare, and appearing on the screen to deliver, the daily news bulletin. No previous experience necessary.

The secretary is taking this down.

AIDAN (CONT'D)
Have we got a typewriter?

SECRETARY
Yes, and I've found you a desk, it's on its way.

At the end of the corridor a small procession arrives, the construction team from Bovis, led by Brownrigg and his assistant Sam (25) who reach the chair..

BROWNRIGG
(the chair)
What's this? What are you doing in my building?

Arthur stands up.

ARTHUR
What do you mean, your building?

BROWNRIGG
Who the bloody hell are you?

ARTHUR

Independent Television News. Arthur Clifford, News Editor, Aidan Crawley Editor in Chief, who the bloody hell are you?

Aidan stands up.

BROWNRIGG

(drawing himself up)
Associated Rediffusion, Captain Brownrigg, General Manager.

ARTHUR

Well, Captain Manager. This is a news conference, so if you wouldn't mind, we're a bit busy.

Brownrigg steps forward.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Don't even think about it.

BROWNRIGG

(defensive)
You shouldn't be here. The construction work hasn't started.

Aidan, trying to make peace.

AIDAN

Captain Brownrigg we have a very little time to create a news division, we have no funds for another property. We'll work round the builders. So, er...

ARTHUR

(succinctly)
Sod off and let us get on with it.

A beat as Brownrigg considers his options.

BROWNRIGG

Next deck, gentlemen. Quick march.

He leads the procession back to the stairwell.

AIDAN

I thought you were going to hit him.

ARTHUR

(grin)
Me too. Now where were we?

AIDAN

(to secretary)
Type that up, run down to the Gray's Inn and stick it on the notice board.

ARTHUR

Gray's Inn? Do we really want a barrister?

AIDAN

We want someone who can think on their feet and isn't afraid to cross examine.

10 EXT. BROADCASTING HOUSE - DAY 10

Looking like a huge ocean liner lost at sea, the stately prow of the BBC's flagship building looks down Portland Place towards Oxford Circus. A solitary taxi passes.

MIALL

A morning 'talks' programme?

11 INT. CORRIDOR, BROADCASTING HOUSE - DAY 11

Robin is following Len Miall as he heads for his office.

ROBIN

You see, there's nothing on the Light Programme till nine, so my programme could start before that. Eight o'clock or even earlier.

MIALL

The BBC Home Service is transmitting at that time.

ROBIN

Music, yes, but this would be different. A mix of news and comments, a film review perhaps.

Miall goes into his office and Robin follows.

12 INT. OFFICE, BROADCASTING HOUSE - DAY 12

A small office on the sixth floor, furnished like a 1930's drawing room. A secretary is placing some correspondence on the desk.

MIALL

(brisk)

Get me Recorded Programmes.

She nods and hurries out.

MIALL (CONT'D)

(sitting)

Are you aware of any pressing demand on the BBC for a morning 'Talks' programme?

ROBIN
(struggling)
Well...

MIALL
Street marches? Letters to the Times,
questions in the House, that sort of
thing?

He starts to look through his correspondence.

ROBIN
No but... surely it's not up to the
audience to demand something, it's our
job to offer them the choice.

MIALL
(sarcastic)
And who do you think will want to get up
that early?

ROBIN
(exasperated)
But they are up, and thousands of them
are in their cars, listening to the
radio.

MIALL
I wasn't referring to the audience, Mr
Day, I was referring to BBC staff. We'd
all have to be here at five in the
morning! You're new here aren't you? I'd
learn to walk before you try running.

The phone rings and he picks it up. Robin understands
this is his cue to leave.

13

INT. LEW GRADE'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

13

A large open plan London flat in a modern Marble Arch
apartment. Sitting round the table are the Grade family,
Lew and his blonde wife, Kathy (30), Leslie Grade (39)
and his wife Audrey. Kathy is serving a dessert.

LESLIE
What are you going to do?

KATHY
(to Lew)
Pass that to your brother.

LEW
I don't know.
(passing)
You know me, I don't like failing an
audition.

LESLIE

What does your Board say?

LEW

Littler was against it from the start, Val just cares about the Palladium. I think they're glad to be out of it.

KATHY

Perhaps they're right.

LEW

(to Leslie)

When were you last in America?

LESLIE

Me? Why would I want to spend two days strapped to life raft in a tin can? The stopover in Alaska is not my idea of fun.

LEW

Exactly, Kathy's the same. So when I'm there, I'm on my own in the hotel. Do you know how long it took me to persuade Sinatra to come do the Palladium?

LESLIE

Now there was a show.

LEW

Three weeks sitting in a hotel room waiting for him to see me. And what do I do? Watch television! I've seen it, I know what it can do. 'I Love Lucy', 'The Ed Sullivan Show', 'Dragnet'!

LESLIE

Make some programmes then, that's what all these new companies are going to need in six months' time.

LEW

And how am I supposed to do that? What do I know about making programmes?

LESLIE

Well, find someone who does. But stay away from the BBC - it's called Independent Television, so look for Independent people.

14

EXT. TELEVISION HOUSE - DAY

14

Lynne walks up to the front door of the building which is obscured by scaffolding. The doors are boarded up except for one side door.

A sign reads: "Under construction as the centre of London's Commercial Television Activities... from whence will be transmitted the best television" with an arrow pointing left to the remaining door.

15

INT. RECEPTION, TELEVISION HOUSE - DAY

15

The reception is a building site with scaffolding and ladders everywhere. Instead of doors, there are holes in the brick walls, awaiting doors and door frames. A temporary desk has been set up in one corner with a uniformed Commissionaire, Albert (60).

LYNNE

Hello, TV Times. I'm here to interview Mr Crawley.

ALBERT

TV what?

LYNNE

TV Times. We're new.

(looking around at the chaos)

Like you. I assume this is Television House?

ALBERT

It will be. One day. Name?

LYNNE

Reid Banks. Miss.

ALBERT

Sign in here, then.

(as she signs)

First floor. Lift's not working, so you'll have to take the stairs. And you'll need to announce yourself as the phones aren't working either.

LYNNE

Thank you.

She sets off up the stairs, passing workmen coming down...

16

INT. OFFICE, BROADCASTING HOUSE - DAY

16

Robin comes in, looking a little furtive. He turns and locks the door behind him and heads for the phone, pulling a piece of paper out of his pocket, and dials. We read the number: 'Aldwych 2112' and written above it: 'ITA Newscaster'.

ROBIN
(into phone)
Hello? Yes. Well, I'm calling in connection with an advertisement I saw, well, a friend of mine saw, in the Inns of Court... No no, I used to be a barrister, that's right... Yes of course, my name is Day. That's right... Robin Day, it's about your newscasting job.

LYNNE (O.S.)
Do you see ITV News as different from the BBC?

17 INT. NEWSROOM, TELEVISION HOUSE - DAY

17

A large empty room in which there are just two chairs. Lynne sits on one whilst Aidan paces up and down.

AIDAN
Yes. Independent, obviously, impartial of course, but that doesn't mean we're afraid of having an opinion. Able to tell a story and able to make an argument. Instead of 'Newsreaders' we'll have 'Newscasters'...

Lynne is writing rapidly in her notebook.

LYNNE
(interrupting)
Which means exactly?

AIDAN
Someone who can write, not just read. Someone with the immediacy and authority of the Manchester Guardian, looking you directly in the eye. A British Ed Murrow delivering news personally, clearly and simply using his... or her, own voice.

LYNNE
Her?

AIDAN
Of course, for the 'afternoon audience'. The housewife is very important to us. Now, if you don't mind, I think it's my job to ask the questions. So, what's your experience?

LYNNE
(confused)
My experience?

AIDAN

(reassuring)

Don't worry, I'm not looking for qualifications, but I am interested in experience. What are you passionate about? Are you a debater, are you interested in the law? Or the arts?

Lynne looks blank.

AIDAN (CONT'D)

(prompting)

You are here for an interview?

LYNNE

Well... yes...

(beginning to understand)

Yes, I suppose I am.

AIDAN

Well?

LYNNE

(taking the plunge)

My experience? Well, I used to be an actress...

AIDAN

(encouraging)

Good, stage presence! Definitely something we're looking for. Anything else?

LYNNE

(cottoning on)

And I'm now working.... Well, I was until very recently working, as a journalist.

She surreptitiously hides her notebook behind her back.

AIDAN

Very good. What paper?

LYNNE

Well, it was more a magazine than an actual paper, but we cover...

(correcting herself)

Covered er... current affairs, entertainment and sport... a bit of everything really, but I am very interested in what you were saying about television... looking the audience in the eye. That's what I love about the stage, the immediacy.

18 **INT. LEW'S OUTER OFFICE, GRADE AGENCY - DAY** 18

Four secretaries sit at separate desks, opposite each other. They are all on the phone fielding different calls, we hear the continual refrain 'Grade Agency, can I help you, can you tell me the dates...'. Leslie escorts a striking, dark haired, American woman, Hannah Weinstein (44) past the 'guards'.

HANNAH

And he's definitely read the script I gave you?

LESLIE GRADE

Of course. He loves it.

He walks into Lew's office without knocking and Hannah follows.

19 **INT. LEW'S OFFICE, GRADE AGENCY - DAY** 19

Lew is at his desk, on the phone, he beckons them in.

LEW

Well she will need a bigger room, she's a big star and big stars need big rooms. I shouldn't need to tell you that Sammy.

(seeing Leslie)

Yes well, call me when you've fixed it.

LESLIE GRADE

Lew, I want you to meet Hannah Weinstein. She's a producer, made the Colonel March films with Karloff last year and she's got an idea for you.

LEW

(greeting)

Mrs Weinstein.

HANNAH

Hannah, please.

LESLIE GRADE

(withdrawing)

I'll leave you to it.

He goes.

HANNAH

So, did you get a chance to look at 'The Adventure of Robin Hood'?

Lew looks around there are scripts on the floor and on the desk in piles.

LEW

Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

(no idea)

Mrs Weinstein, can I be honest with you?
You're a producer, I'm an agent. My
talent is people. When I meet someone
with talent, I feel it, here.

(his heart)

You see a hundred acts, you pick one, you
can't explain it. It's not about logic,
it's there or it isn't. I've got your
script, as you can see I've got lots of
scripts, but I'd rather hear about it
from you.

HANNAH

It's simple enough, a man who robs the
rich to feed the poor, who defends the
weak against the strong.

LEW

(half-joking)

Not one of these communists I hope!

Hannah hesitates for a split second. Is this for real?

HANNAH

He's a man of the people, yes, a great
British hero and just about the only one
who isn't a toff, so the rest of the
world will love him too, which means that
we're not just talking about one market.
I think this will sell to the Americans
as well as the British.

LEW

That I like, go on.

HANNAH

It's a western set in a wood, a guy, a
girl, a villain and a fight for justice.
It's simple, but simple is what works.

LEW

How many episodes?

HANNAH

How many do you want?

LEW

No idea.

HANNAH

Let's say thirty five, to start with.

LEW

Do you have the scripts? I mean we'd have to get started. We have writers in the agency here...

HANNAH

(quickly)

I already have a team of very experience writers ready to go and we have a star - he's British and a war hero, but he's been working in Hollywood for the last eight years. American audiences know his face and more importantly so do the American networks. Network executives may not know what they like, but they prefer to like someone they know.

Lew picks up the photograph of Richard Greene.

LESLIE GRADE (OS)

Three hundred and fifty thousand pounds?

20

EXT. SOHO STREET - DAY

20

Lew is walking down the street with Leslie.

LEW

Thirty five episodes and we own the rest of the world. When we sell it to an American network we're in profit before we start.

LESLIE

If you sell it. That's all of your capital!

LEW

Not quite.

LESLIE

Three quarters! What are your Board saying? I thought they didn't want to get involved.

LEW

I haven't told them yet.

(shrug)

I liked her, what can I say? She's a real Independent, that's what you wanted. You know me, I go with this.

He taps his heart.

LESLIE

Well, you'd better make sure you can find a Broadcaster who agrees with you, if you want to keep it beating!