Whatever happened to the Britcom? - Part One

British Sitcom has changed more over the last fifteen years than ever before in its history. Joseph Reaney uncovers the roots of this dramatic transformation and speculates on what the future holds for the nation's flagship television genre.

'Sitcom: A comedy, esp. as part of a television or radio series, in which the humour derives from the situations the characters are placed in.'
(Dictionary definition)

The real-world definition of 'Situation comedy' has adapted and evolved over its 60-year-history but there are many core characteristics associated with the genre that have not changed. If a programme is billed as Sitcom, an audience can reasonably expect a thirty-minute, scripted, self-contained narrative comedy involving an ensemble of recurring fictional characters within a workplace, home or institution. It is usually recorded in front of a live audience or with an artificial laughter track added, and by multiple cameras. Above all, the television audience should expect to laugh.

There is much debate as to where the roots of Sitcom lie. Some theorists credit 14th century pageant dramas as the source while others cite Shakespeare's comedies, pantomime or 19th-century newspaper sketches. Radio comedies of the 1930s and 1940s such as *Band Waggon* and *It's That Man Again* included regular recurring characters as well as the guest stars and musical interludes that were standards of the dominant 'variety show' format of the time. It was British television that would give the world its first sitcom.

At 8.31pm on 29th November 1946, *Pinwright's Progress* began its ten-week run on the BBC. It charted the adventures of J Pinwright, the successful proprietor of a multiple store with a good income and a loving family. He was a witty, intelligent, self-aware character, which was common in American comedy at the time. However, when *Hancock's Half Hour* began its first radio series in 1954, a new breed of British Sitcom character was born. Tony Hancock was a lovable loser, 'a belligerent, pompous, frequently childish and petulant middle-aged bachelor' (Krutnik & Neale; *Popular Film and Television Comedy*).

The differences between American and British sitcom characters are still apparent now: characters in *Friends* and *Frasier* are aspirational, quick-witted heroes who comment humorously on their own drawbacks and inadequacies, while characters in *I'm Alan Partridge* and *The Office* are hopeless losers, unaware of their drawbacks and other peoples' attitudes towards them. With the transfer of *Hancock's Half Hour* to television in 1956, more Britcom standards were set. It pioneered the 'kitchen sink' style and focussed on character and situation more

The Worst Week of my Life: BBC

Laugh or the dog does not get a treat.

than quick-fire gags - another step away from the American model.

The next highly influential and successful sitcom was *Steptoe and Son*. It came from the writing duo Galton & Simpson (of *Hancock's Half Hour*) and established more Sitcom values. It was the first of its kind to employ actors in the main parts rather than comedians (the writing duo decided that they wanted performers who 'didn't count their laughs'). It also introduced the great Sitcom theme of entrapment. Harold was desperate to escape to the 'swinging sixties' but was held back by his father Albert. This has been a much-used theme since, whether the institution is employment, marriage or physical restraint (prison, the army etc.).

Over the next thirty years, Sitcom charted the lives of clergymen, officers and soldiers, department store employees, landlords, hoteliers, shopkeepers, vets, MPs, market traders, students and butlers, to name but a few. It became the dominant form on television, was declared dead and then rose again. But despite such a tempestuous past, the content and production of Sitcom managed to remain relatively unchanged. That is, until recently...

In this new millennium, Sitcom is a very different thing. So many of the rules have been broken, critics disagree over what can even be defined as Sitcom. The 'thirty minute' rule was flouted with *Marion & Geoff* (approximately 8 minutes) and *Green Wing* (approximately 50 minutes). The scripted rule was questioned with the much-improvised sitcom *Operation Good Guys*. The 'self-contained' rule was threatened with *The Office* and its use of serial elements and character arcs. The 'multiple camera' rule was defied in *That Peter Kay Thing* and *Peep Show*.

So, why has the British Sitcom changed so dramatically over the last fifteen years? Is the change a natural evolution or does the modern audience simply demand more from its sitcoms? What does the future hold for Britain's most cherished television genre?

Production and content

The Process

'With a few notable exceptions ... working-class life has been repeatedly ignored by British sitcoms.' (Brett Mills, *Television Sitcom*)

Throughout its long history, the British Sitcom has commonly been penned by male, middle-class, Oxbridge graduates for male, middle-class audiences. Although there are some high-profile exceptions such as Galton & Simpson's *Steptoe and Son* and Johnny Speight's *Till Death Us Do Part*, they are in a small minority compared to the total Sitcom production since the 1940s. There has, however, been a recent trend towards better representing the diversity of Britain. There was a boom in black comedy in the UK during the early 1990s with the successful sitcom *Desmond's* and sketch show *The Real McCoy* leading the way. Though *Desmond's* remains the only highly successful sitcom of predominantly non-white cast, comedy programmes such as *Little Miss Jocelyn*, *The Kumars at No. 42* and *3 Non-Blondes* go some way towards reflecting the multicultural makeup of modern Britain.

In an age of dropping ratings and high-risk commissions, broadcasters are looking for the 'complete package'.

Women have feminised the genre with sitcoms like *Absolutely Fabulous* and *Dinnerladies* and sketch shows like *Smack the Pony*, and working-class life has hit our screens in the shape of *The Royle Family*, Peter Kay's *Phoenix Nights* and *Ideal*.

From the 1970s to the early 1990s, only half a dozen writers (including John Sullivan, Roy Clarke and Marks & Gran) were creating and writing the vast majority of BBC sitcoms. There was no training scheme in place, so very few new writers were joining the BBC. However, the emergence of BBC Choice (which became BBC3 in 2003) meant that new writers could be trained on niche programmes like *Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps*. This afforded the BBC an influx of new talent and meant that the opportunity to create sitcom was open to people across the country and not just white, middle-class men.

As previously mentioned, *Steptoe and Son* was the first sitcom to employ actors rather than comedians, a trend that seems to have been reversed in recent years. There have been several modern sitcoms that use comedians in their main roles, such as *15 Storeys High* and *Phoenix Nights*. It is notable that in these cases, the actors (Sean Lock and Peter Kay respectively) are also creators and writers on their series. Paul Mayhew-Archer, co-creator of *The Vicar of Dibley* and writer on *My Hero*, argues that this duality allows a sitcom to arrive on the screen 'fully formed'. Though this is not an entirely new concept (*Fawlty Towers* employed it over thirty years ago) it has gained prominence recently as, in an age of dropping ratings and high-risk commissions, broadcasters are looking for the 'complete package'. As a result of this, there are now sitcoms where comedians are employed as actors only and are not involved with writing, such as *Peep Show* (David Mitchell and Robert Webb) and *Ideal* (Johnny Vegas).

The production of Sitcom from script has also changed dramatically. For over 45 years, the standard production technique was the 'three-headed-monster': a set with three cameras located in front of the live audience at the invisible 'fourth wall', recording the scene as a whole and also two-character reaction shots. This was pioneered by the American mega-sitcom *I Love Lucy* but is in decline in favour of single-camera shows. A major reason for this could be the influence of fast-paced cinema and television drama which were making Sitcom appear slow. Consequently, in the fifteen years since 1992, the average number of scenes in a thirty-minute British sitcom has risen from thirteen to twenty-two.

Another blow to the three-headed-monster style of production was the rise of *cinéma vérité* born out of the 1990s documentary boom. In order for sitcoms like *People Like Us* and *The Office* to maintain the pretence of documentary, they aped the style of shooting and dispensed with the audience. This meant that sitcom characters were aware of the camera and could play up to it; their 'unpredictability' results in reaction shots often being cut short or missed as the camera tries to keep up, the opposite purpose of the multi-camera setup.

The boom in single-camera comedy meant that new shows that could never have been shot on set in front of a live audience were produced. *Spaced* employed short, succinct shots and editing, and parodied Hollywood films. *Peep Show* uses head-mounted cameras so that every shot is seen from a character's perspective. *The Mighty Boosh* uses enclosed sets, blue-screen backgrounds and CGI to create its fantastical settings and characters.

Mills argues that single-camera comedy has been used sporadically in American sitcoms through the decades, and that Sitcom cannot be defined by the way it is shot. Audiences are still deriving pleasure from the same interpersonal conflicts that have always identified the genre, and characters like David Brent are just as exaggerated as Basil Fawlty or Tony Hancock. British Sitcom has attempted to reflect reality in its characters and plots since *Steptoe and Son*, and *cinéma vérité* is simply a modern way of trying to achieve this. However, Mills accepts that changes in production have the potential to revolutionise the genre, and calls the abandonment of the laughter track 'the most significant development in the Sitcom form since the introduction of the three-headed-monster'.

Lager touts

2 Pints of Lager: BBC

The laughter track came about as a means of audience transition. Narrative comedy had always been a communal activity with communal laughter from streets to theatres to cinemas. Early radio comedies were recordings of live vaudeville and music-hall performances, with the audience's laughter audible. So when Sitcom started to emerge on television and radio, producers decided to stick with tradition and record in front of a live audience. After all, performers were used to working like this and the laughter track would give radio listeners the sense of community that they were used to.

... the influence of fast-paced cinema and television drama ... were making Sitcom appear slow. Consequently, in the fifteen years since 1992, the average number of scenes in a thirty-minute British sitcom has risen from thirteen to twenty-two.

When Sitcom started to move from sets to locations, the laughter went with them, overlaid as a soundtrack and occasionally (especially in America) 'sweetened' if the true audience reaction were less than required. This idea was borne out of theatre where producers used to employ people to sit in an audience and laugh, clap, scream, cry or invoke any emotion desired at the appropriate time to encourage the audience to follow suit.

Although the laughter track has been a constant of the Britcom until very recently, it has gone in and out of fashion in America. In fact, in the 1960s, the multi-camera, live-studio audience format was a rarity and only two big hits of the time employed this technique: *The Lucy Show* and *The Dick Van Dyke Show.* Other big hits like *The Andy Griffith Show, Leave It To Beaver* and *The Beverly Hillbillies* were shot with a single camera and no studio audience.

The live audience returned with a conscious push from producers Norman Lear and Grant Tinker, who considered the single-camera format as tired as the studio-audience format may appear to a modern

Absolutely Fabulous: BBC

Fashion victims

audience. Since then, the laughter track has been left out of the occasional series (*Police Squad* in the 1980s, *Sports Night* series two in the 1990s) but has been present in the vast majority. However, with new offerings like *Curb Your Enthusiasm, Arrested Development* and *The Office,* America may choose to dispense with the studio audience once more.

In Britain, satirical comedy programmes of the 1980s and early 1990s like *Spitting Image* and *The Day Today* were produced without an audience or laughter track. The first British sitcom to do this was the 1997 mockumentary *Operation Good Guys*, though this was pressured into employing a laughter track for series two and three. The first big success that dispensed with the audience and laughter track altogether was *The Royle Family,* which was also shot in single-camera style to create realism. Further successes without canned laughter followed in the forms of *Spaced, Phoenix Nights* and *The Office*. This concept began to be copied by other sitcoms and is now so dominant that recent sitcoms and sketch shows that could easily accommodate an audience have chosen not to, including mainstream BBC1 outings like *The Worst Week of My Life.* In fact, since *15 Storeys High* in 2002, over 70% of new sitcoms (those which have been dubbed 'situation comedy' by the mass-media) have been produced without an audience or laughter track.

The debate is whether this decline is simply a fashion, comparable to what happened to American sitcoms of the 1960s and alternative British comedies of the 1980s, or as Merle Nygate (assessor of Sitcom at BBC Entertainment Commissioning) suggests, an indicator that 'audiences are becoming more sophisticated'. It is certainly reasonable to suggest that the original 'transitional' purpose of the laughter track is outdated, as collective experience has generally given way to isolated entertainment.

Some theorists argue that the laughter track is also useful as an immediate indicator of the type of programme a viewer has channel-hopped onto. Yet in an age of self-scheduling and on-demand television, perhaps channel-hopping is also becoming a thing of the past. Even if the laughter track could justify itself in a modern climate, with the fast-paced delivery, action and editing of many of today's situation comedies, would an audience be able to get a laugh in edgeways?

The product

'Critics prefer their comedy outrageous, excruciating, embarrassing and politically incorrect.' (Marc Blake, *The Comedy of Cringe*)

Sitcoms of the last fifteen years have pushed the boundaries of the genre. They have ranged from the hyper-reality of *The Office* to the heightened reality of *Father Ted* to the fantastical *The Mighty Boosh*. There have been animated sitcoms (*I Am Not An Animal*), sitcoms with interior monologue (*Peep Show*) and sitcoms that are as much about 'warm' sentiment as comedy (*The Royle Family*).

The most significant influence for this new diversity is the rise of minority channels. Since the arrival of Channel 4, then satellite and digital television, audiences have dispersed. This means that sitcoms no longer need mass appeal and large audiences but can find their own niche demographics. This theory can be backed up by the situation in America where subscription cable television has been available for six decades. They have been creating experimental sitcoms for just as long, with the 1960s alone producing *Mister Ed, The Munsters* and the animated sitcom *The Flintstones.*

With the recent experimentation in British Sitcom, new trendsetters have emerged. One of the biggest Sitcom fashions of the new millennium is towards 'cringe comedy' where audiences are as embarrassed by events on screen as they are amused. An oft-cited example of this new trend is David Brent's infamous dance in series two of *The Office*. However, it is arguable that this is not a new comedy form at all and has a very strong precedent in the form of *Fawlty Towers.* Basil Fawlty comes very close to a complete breakdown in each episode whilst being relentlessly tortured by customers and his overbearing wife. In fact, the two series are very similar in their premises: a hellish manager in midlife crisis lording it over employees who are cowed by their need of a job.

SIMILAR? Basil Fawlty in 1975
and David Brent in 2001.

Cringe comedy today may have roots in a sitcom thirty years old but it is certainly enjoying more widespread popularity than ever before with some programmes taking the form to the brink of bad taste. Sitcom has ▸

a long reputation for tackling taboos and prejudices and does seem to enjoy a special dispensation in the UK from the normal taste and decency constraints of television. Mills argues that complaints about Sitcom will often be greeted with the response that the complainer has no sense of humour - a damning criticism in British society. However, the recent climate of niche audiences means that sitcoms that may previously have been deemed too offensive for mass consumption, have found audiences on minority channels.

BBC3's acclaimed *Nighty Night*, for example, charts the attempts of Jill to seduce her neighbour, having told the world that her hospitalised husband is dead. While Basil Fawlty was held back by his need for custom and by Sybil, and David Brent was censored by his need for employment and the knowledge that he was being filmed, Jill Tyrrell has nothing reining her in. Blake argues that it is only through the mockumentary feel, which makes the audience they 'are interlopers, not participants' (2006, p.48), that the programme manages to get away with such a potentially unpalatable premise.

A huge change in Britcom content and form in recent years is the development of serial elements. The 'serial' is a programme that has storylines taken through several episodes before conclusion, a trait more associated with Soap operas and multi-part dramas. Sitcom has always been the definitive 'series': each episode has its own narrative story that begins and concludes therein. Krutnik & Neale describe it as a 'recurring process of destabilization-restabilization', where the *status quo* is broken and restored within the thirty-minute episode. It was traditionally so rigid, in fact, that events in previous episodes were never commented on again. However, while British sitcoms still have some situations that begin and end within one episode, serial strands and character arcs have begun to appear across series.

America has been employing serial elements in their sitcoms for several decades. Jeff Greenstein, writer on *Friends* and *Will & Grace*, argues that this is because their sitcom series generally lasts for 20 episodes or more, so they employ ongoing storylines and character arcs to keep viewer interest. A good example in recent times is *Friends*, where many of the jokes in later series actually rely upon a general familiarity with previous episodes. There was also a continuing on-off relationship between Ross and Rachel that ran through all ten series. Greenstein argues that this breeds loyalty with viewers because they feel rewarded by better inclusion in jokes. This technique is now so commonplace in America that shows like *The Simpsons* even parody the cyclical form of 'traditional' Sitcoms: Montgomery Burns can never remember who Homer Simpson is despite their many memorable altercations in the past.

Green Wing: Channel 4

Tutu gorgeous

So why has Britain begun to employ this technique? Our series generally last between six and eight episodes and few make it past two series (an obvious exception is *Last of the Summer Wine* that begins its 29th series this year, 2007), so surely there is no such desperation to keep viewer interest. One argument for why Britcoms have adopted this technique is that it is an attempt to create realism. Life does not happen in thirty-minute chapters so hyper-real sitcoms like *The Office* do not want to suggest that this is the case. Therefore, ongoing storylines about mergers and redundancies run through the series.

The Office also employs the character arc, an element that has come from cinema and television drama. Characters in Sitcom may have learned lessons in one episode but will have reverted to their old ways in the next. As George Santayana famously said: 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.' Traditionally, when Sitcom characters experienced change, it would spell the end of the programme (such as Timothy standing up to his mother in *Sorry!*). This is a possible reason why film adaptations of sitcoms have rarely worked, as the film medium demands character change. But now, characters are beginning to remember and they're learning from their mistakes. *The Office* had the developing love triangle between Dawn, Tim and Lee throughout the two series and Christmas specials.

However, though characters are developing in small ways, any major changes in situation will still spell the end of the series. For example, the final episode of *The Office* showed Dawn leaving her fiancé and sharing a passionate kiss with Tim. The characters had fully changed and the romance was resolved, so the sitcom was over.

The development of the character arc in Britcom, like the use of serial strands, is therefore an attempt to create realism. In the same way that fixed sets and multiple cameras may seem contrived to a modern audience, the same is true of unchanging characters and situations. As long as things don't change too much and characters don't become too different from the ones who hooked the audience in the first place, serial elements will continue to be included in British Sitcom.

The US and UK

Different Markets: 'Chalk' and 'Cheers'

Boxing surreal

Bee serious

'Sitcom seems to be a purely Anglo-American Art Form.' (Jimmy Perry, co-writer of *Dad's Army* and *Hi-De-Hi!*)

American and British sitcoms may have similar roots but there are significant differences between the two forms and their markets. In Britain, our Soaps tackle realistic and cultural issues and our sitcoms are escapist entertainment, whereas American sitcoms have often been culturally relevant and moralistic while their Soaps are melodramatic romances.

The highly industrialised sitcom production of the US also means that an episode can be broadcast within a week of being written so it can deal with issues that are currently in the news. For example, *Roseanne* made many references to the O J Simpson trial while it was in progress. By comparison, a British sitcom can take years from pen to screen so a programme like *Drop the Dead Donkey*, which was recorded close to transmission and showed characters discussing current affairs over the credits, had a unique selling point on UK television.

The responsibility that US sitcoms hold means that they have evolved differently from our own. While British sitcoms have lovable losers in the lead surrounded by eccentrics, backstabbers and bastards, the US sitcom has aspirational leads in morally-sound environments. The appearance of *Friends* in 1994 helped to launch the coffee-shop culture in America, and viewers aspired to move into high-rise apartments with their peers. It's very difficult to imagine any audience member aspiring to be like Basil Fawlty, Alan Partridge or David Brent. These conflicting mentalities are noticeable immediately with the sitcom theme tunes: *Friends* proclaims "I'll be there for you" and *Cheers* is a bar where "everybody knows your name", while Victor Meldrew has *One Foot in the Grave* and *The Royle Family* would like to be "half the world away" - perhaps in America.

The original 'transitional' purpose of the laughter track is outdated, as collective experience has generally given way to isolated entertainment.

But despite these differences, sitcoms produced in one market are often sellable in the other. Since the launch of Channel 4 and its decision to schedule *Cheers*, British television has shown US sitcoms on its screens. Americans also have an interest in British sitcoms but they are rarely shown unedited. This may be because our comedy is considered too controversial to attract sponsors and fulfil the social responsibility quota. Instead, American networks buy the formats to British sitcoms then re-write, re-situate and re-characterise them.

This is sometimes very successful, as shown by the *Steptoe and Son* remake *Sanford and Son,* the *Till Death Us Do Part* remake *All In The Family* and more recently, *The Office* remake. However, it can also fail by removing all the edge and controversy (and subsequent humour) that made the original a hit in Britain. It is alleged that on *Payne*, one of the many attempted remakes of *Fawlty Towers,* producer and star John Larroquette asked writers to change Basil and Sybil's relationship to 'one of love, rather than hate'.

Another reason that some remakes fail is because they are not culturally relevant in their new market. This can be shown by the rare attempts at British remakes of American sitcoms. *Brighton Belles* was a remake of *The Golden Girls* and *Days Like These* was a remake of *That 70s Show,* but despite having almost verbatim scripts with only minor references changed, they both failed. This is probably because they did not ring true in Britain: elderly, retired women don't live together by the beach and young men manage to be sexually active

without owning cars due to Britain's public transport infrastructure. Similarly in America, a show will fail if it is not culturally accurate. The remake of *The Office* initially received lukewarm attention, having hardly diverted from the British pilot, but it gradually won critical acclaim and respectable audiences as it began to create original and relevant storylines like basketball competitions and award ceremonies.

However, if cultural relevance is so important, why does British television show unedited American programmes? Some argue that it is because we are less parochial than our American counterparts but in reality, US sitcoms do not perform particularly well. They rarely appear on the mainstream BBC1 or ITV channels and recent 'successes' like *Desperate Housewives* or *Sex and The City* do not manage the same ratings as new British shows. Even the audiences for *Friends*, the most successful American import since *Cheers*, 'while large for Channel 4, show that it is really a minority programme' (Mills). It is possible that it may have done better on BBC1 or ITV1 but neither of them bid for the rights, which suggests that mainstream and older audiences still have a resistance to foreign programming.

As a general rule, both British and American audiences want characters and situations that they can relate to, so tend to favour homegrown sitcoms. There is a good relationship between the two markets because our societies are similar enough to understand styles of humour and the majority of cultural references. We cannot necessarily share these same references with other countries and much of the wit and wordplay of foreign-language sitcoms would not translate. Though American and British sitcoms are often dubbed into other languages, our audiences rarely (if ever) see a dubbed programme on their television schedules. Sitcom is not a purely Anglo-American art form but audiences on either side of the Atlantic will accept little else on the box.

The American influence

'Comedy is often better when it goes through more hands.' (Julian Friedmann, scriptwriting agent)

The British Sitcom owes a great deal to its American counterpart. As well as pioneering the 'three-headed-monster', it has also affected the pace of the British Sitcom and introduced serial elements. Despite all these influences, though, there has remained a clear distinction between the two forms with regards to the role of the writer.

The traditional system in Britain is for one, two or three writers to come up with an idea, series outline and a pilot script to sell to a broadcaster or production company. If it is purchased and commissioned, they will form a team and start to produce. The writer holds considerable creative control over all subsequent scripts and is often consulted throughout the process.

In America, a producer will often come up with a concept and pilot episode storyline, then employ writers to create a pilot script. It is the producer who retains creative control throughout. This method means that American scripts tend to have more jokes per minute than British sitcoms but writers have less control over the ethos of the series. Americans are also often writing roles for established comedians so have to fit their comedy routines, whereas British writers create characters and cast actors in the roles.

MADE FOR THE ROLE: Roseanne Barr, Bill Cosby and Tim Allen starred in *Roseanne*, *The Cosby Show* and *Home Improvement* respectively.

The main reason for the American team-writing system is to cram as many gags as possible into thirty minutes. *Roseanne* ran for nine years and sold to over 150 countries worldwide. A great deal of money was spent on writers and script development in the knowledge that success would bring huge financial rewards.

British sitcom sales do not garner the same return so broadcasters cannot afford to pay ten writers to insert gags into comedy scripts. If BBC Comedy commissions a huge, award-winning success, the money made goes into the BBC rather than specifically to the department that produced the show. Also, most successful Britcoms will still only sell to 40 countries (although *'Allo 'Allo* managed to sell to 90). This means that mainstream Sitcom is not as rewarding in Britain and Mark Burton (co-writer of *Chicken Run* and *Madagascar*) believes that this explains why 'comedy writers in the States want to work on hugely successful shows [and] Brits want to write something cool'.

Although the US style of Sitcom writing cannot be realistically implemented in Britain, there have been attempts to create a British-style team-writing system. In the 1990s, Laurence Marks and Maurice Gran set up teams on their successful sitcoms *Birds of a Feather* and *Goodnight Sweetheart*. Writers came together to plan storylines and come up with the occasional joke but individuals wrote each episode independently. This style of team-writing worked effectively while allowing writers to maintain creative control, and has since been employed on sitcoms as varied as *My Hero*, *Two Pints* and *Green Wing*.

In 2000, *My Family* aired on the BBC. This was a British sitcom created and produced by Fred Barron, an American with experience as a writer on series like *The Larry Sanders Show* and creator of *Caroline in the City*. It had many hallmarks of an American series, such as aspirational and moralistic characters, the use of sets rather than locations and being shot in FRV (field-removed video) to give the show a glossy finish, but the most significant was the use of a team-writing system. *My Family*, despite critical hostility, was a commercial success and to date seven series have been produced.

Fred Barron has followed this with *After You've Gone*, another mainstream team-written outing that will have a second series later in 2007. Burton believes that the development of team writing in Britain could become more common in the future as in an age of increased pressure on mainstream series, it may be the only way to ensure broadcasters can assuredly commission new series.

Part 2 of this article will be in the November issue of *Scriptwriter* Magazine. It will look at the effect of technology and audience trends on the British Sitcom and discuss the uncertain future of the genre.

Joseph Reaney has a degree in scriptwriting from Bournemouth University and aspires to write television comedy for a living. His first play *The Dating Game* premiered to rave reviews at Edinburgh Fringe 2007. The playscript is available from Amozon and other online bookstores. josephreaney@hotmail.co.uk