



**DOUGLAS IS
CANCELLED**

PRESS PACK

Introduction

“How many times do I have to tell you, when you’re out in public, and civilians can hear you, you must be balanced, boring and bland.”

Douglas Is Cancelled is a four-part comedy drama starring Hugh Bonneville, Karen Gillan, Ben Miles, Alex Kingston, Nick Mohammed and Simon Russell-Beale, written by Primetime Emmy and BAFTA Award winning screenwriter Steven Moffat and produced by Hartswood Films.

Douglas Is Cancelled introduces us to middle aged, and greying, current affairs news anchor, Douglas Bellows, a respected broadcaster and raconteur who loves the life he’s created with his newspaper editor wife, Sheila. Whilst an experienced broadcaster for Live At Six, behind the scenes Douglas surprisingly needs constant reassurance from his sharper, younger, tech savvy, social media aware co-anchor, Madeline, who appears to be able to wrap him around her little finger. His life is privileged as he’s regarded as a national treasure and apparently, can do no wrong, until he makes an ill-advised joke at his cousin’s wedding, which is overheard by a fellow guest, who threatens to expose his comments on social media. Speculation is rife and during the on-going hysteria and digital storm, Douglas’s alleged indiscretion is dissected, analysed and blown out of all proportion. Everyone appears to have an opinion and Douglas is struggling to escape the controversy. It’s a chaotic and unmanageable situation, but can Douglas count on the support of his agent and colleagues? What will Douglas do next?

Is he a casualty of ‘cancel culture’? With 2 million followers, what is Madeline’s motivation to social post on Douglas’s behalf? Friend or foe? That is the question.



Character Biographies



Character Biographies

Hugh Bonneville is Douglas Bellows

Douglas Bellows, newsreader, has been the face of war, crisis and death for over thirty years. His wisdom, insight and informed commentary have been guiding the British nation for as long as he's been able to read aloud from an autocue. No matter how dangerous the war zone, or how terrifying the natural disaster, Douglas Bellows has fearlessly introduced the footage from a studio in West London.

For three decades his frown and lowered voice have leant dignity to funerals, elections and royal divorces: to hear your name in his mouth is to assume you've died. Behind the scenes, this ageing national treasure, is a different matter. Douglas is insecure, a little grumpy, and inclined to tell funny stories about people when he's had a few.

One day that's going to get him into trouble, and today might be the day ...



Karen Gillan is Madeline Crow

Madeline Crow is Douglas’s co-presenter and she’s noticed that while they’re supposedly equals, she’s the one who always gets the co prefix. She’s also the one who gets the audience. Madeline learned in her earliest days in the business how the game is played and rather than complain about it, just decided to play it better. She’s faultlessly charming, lethally professional and an enigma to everyone she works with. This isn’t an accident as she ruthlessly controls all public information about her including

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] and is keen

to redact any mention of [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]



Alex Kingston is Sheila Bellows

Sheila Bellows is Douglas' wife and the editor of the kind of scandal-driven tabloid newspaper she'd never dream of reading. Brighter and fiercer than her husband, she is a lioness when she's protecting her family - and an even more savage beast when her paper is ripping apart someone else's.

She has no illusions about the business she's in. It takes a lot of skill to end the careers of the corrupt and powerful - and even more skill to destroy the lives of the completely innocent.

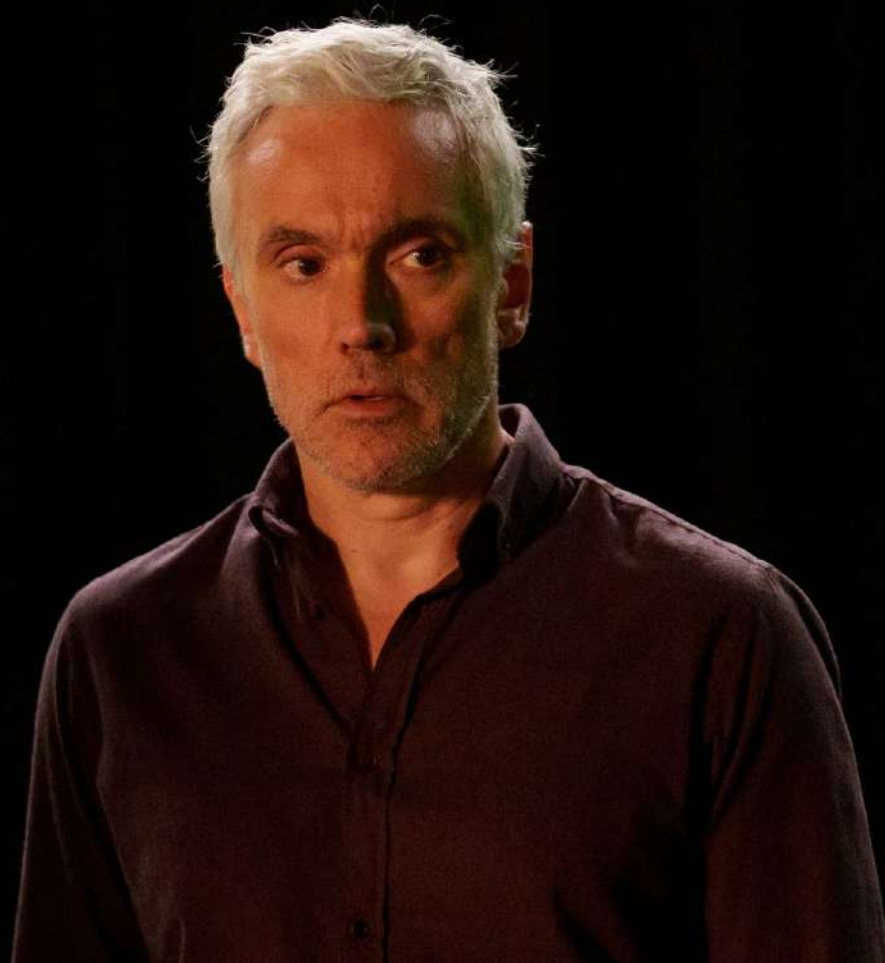
She is permanently at odds with her social justice warrior daughter and in a state of constant worry that Douglas will blow himself up in public someday with the wrong joke or the wrong rant.

Doesn't he know that there are people like *her* out there?



Ben Miles is Toby Patterson

Toby Patterson is Douglas's producer, or as he prefers to put it, his boss. He prides himself on his sophisticated grasp of newsroom politics, but in truth he's an angry cynic who is so busy pretending to understand what's going on he never finds time to actually understand it. In fact, when he first met Madeline Crow



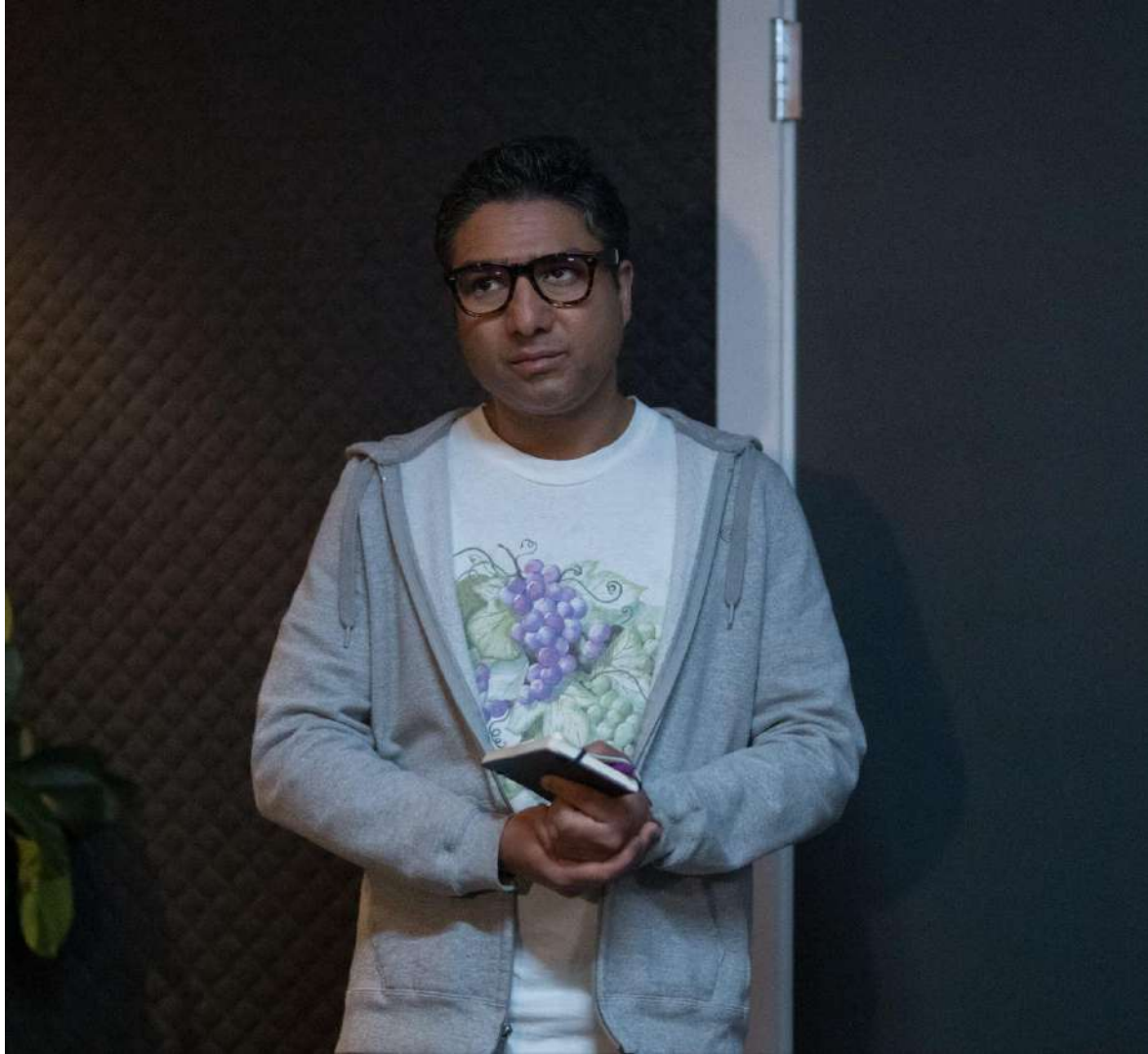
Simon Russell Beale is Bently Cassock

Bently Cassock is the worst agent in the world. He is selfish, shameless, often bewildered and breathtakingly uninformed. His staying power as an agent is based solely on his willingness to cry in the garden of anyone who sacks him. Despite his almost supernatural ability to play on the pity of others, he shows little himself and will cheerfully abandon any client who is in the kind of trouble Douglas is heading towards. As he is inclined to say, a professional bodyguard should always know when it is time to shoot his employer in the back.



Nick Mohammed is Morgan

Morgan is a comedy writer whose current assignment is to provide humorous material to a news based show that never has any humour in it: he is well suited to his job. Despite a life-long devotion to comedy and a heartfelt belief in humour as an agent for social change, Morgan has never in his life said anything funny. He likes to think of himself as part of the Live At Six team but none of them are quite sure what he does or can remember his name. He strongly believes that jokes should never “punch down” though in fairness that isn’t really an option for him.



Madeleine Power is Claudia Bellows

Claudia Bellows is nineteen, a student, and has recently discovered that she's right about everything. It's a burden she tries to carry lightly but when both your parents happen to be wrong about everything in the whole world all of the time it can be hard not to lose your patience. As a very active activist, she is constantly raging at her mother, but sometimes raises herself to a kind of withering pity for her hapless father. She'd really rather not cancel him, but sometimes you have to do the right thing.



Cast Interviews



We ask that the interviews from the *Douglas Is Cancelled* press pack are used within ensemble pieces only. Permission isn't granted to use any of the quotes for solo features.

Hugh Bonneville is Douglas Bellows

*What drew you to *Douglas Is Cancelled*?*

As always, the script. It constantly surprised me with its changes of direction and tone. It made me roar with laughter but, as with all good satire, the laughter gradually turned to ice as the questions raised by the comedy became more stark... harsher. Some of the twists and turns are toe-curlingly funny, but by the end, the lights have gone out, the fun has evaporated and we're into dark territory. To read the whole thing in one sitting was as riveting as it was uncomfortable. Hopefully, the audience will have a similar rollercoaster experience. As an actor, I also found the dynamic between the central quartet intoxicating. It's not often you recognise a terrific drama straight off the page but this was certainly one for me.



Could you outline your character for us?

Douglas has been the anchor of a popular news programme for many years. A man at ease in the corridors of, if not power, then at least of a television network. He's married to Sheila, the Editor of a tabloid newspaper. They have one teenage child, Claudia, who currently identifies as female.

Can you expand on Douglas's character?

Douglas is a perfectly decent, pleasant man who's doing a good job and is well liked for what he does. He thinks so, too. Even when, a couple of years ago, he welcomed a younger colleague, Madeline, onto the sofa beside him he felt secure, safe in the knowledge that the warm, avuncular relationship he had with his protégée wasn't a threat to his own position. Is he smug? I wouldn't say so. Unguardedly confident, definitely. But, just as the dinosaurs didn't know they were a dying breed, Douglas is blithely unaware that the next generation is smarter, more streetwise and capable of sheer ruthlessness when the chips are down. Or when wrongs have not been righted. That's his blind spot. His fatal flaw. That's what's at the heart of his character. Hubris.

What other flaws does Douglas have?

Douglas has been given the label of National Treasure, one he's perfectly happy to wear. As a journalist, a political commentator back in the day - not just a bloke reading an autocue - a properly respected journalist, he's also become more than a little complacent. Having been in the nation's living rooms five nights a week, anyone and everyone knows and likes him. In turn, he thinks he can relax with anyone. But, as Toby his producer, points out, "when you're out in public... you must be balanced, boring and bland." He must never say anything that could be construed as remotely controversial. Because, for some reason, the British public thinks newsreaders aren't human beings. "It's deluded but it's inevitable." And that is where Douglas slips up.

How does Douglas get on with his news producer Toby?

Whatever Douglas says, Toby is the brains of the outfit, although he will always defer to Douglas as his more exposed and therefore vulnerable superior. Douglas never thinks to check what's going on behind the throne.

Did you base Douglas on anyone from real life?

No. I didn't consciously think, "Who's this person like?" If anything, Douglas is a cousin of a character like Ian Fletcher, from Twenty Twelve and W1A - desperately trying to keep things steady, while not realising the extent of the mess that's going on around him, in this instance, a mess entirely of his own making.

How did you find it working with Karen?

I did an episode of Doctor Who with Karen and Matt Smith, and we had a good laugh during a number of rainy night shoots. She has a terrific sense of humour and - my God - her work ethic is extraordinary. She made me feel very old - not her fault, of course - she was just so on top of the dialogue, take after take. I felt like a blundering dray horse next to her galloping thoroughbred. In fact, that's a perfect reflection of our fictional characters. Great casting - rolling eyes emoji.



It's a very timely piece, isn't it?

Definitely. It taps into so many strands of what's current in terms of our views on ethics, behaviour in the workplace and in our wider society, what we can and can't say, what we can and can't do, what's acceptable, what's beyond the pale. Steven Moffat's drama is a kaleidoscope, looking at all those things at once through the prism of these identifiable characters, against a backdrop of current affairs lite. Which is how we all seem to be living at the moment. News as another consumable.

What does the drama have to say about cancel culture?

It's very interesting to see how it's playing out. Cancel culture has been around since the word scapegoat was used in the Bible for people being thrown out of society for not holding generally accepted views. It's always been around us, it's nothing new. What's different today is that the pile-on of the mob is now instantaneous. The speed at which truth and lies accelerate via mainstream and social media is exponential and extraordinary. The way a metaphorical corpse can be mutilated and stamped upon by a mob anonymised by fingers typing at warp speed. 'Right, killed that one several times over. Who's next?'

What makes Steven's writing so strong?

Steven is a superb satirist. As sharp with the absurd one-liner as he is with the dark and dangerous themes that lie beneath. Like all great comedic writers, he draws his audience in with laughter, then deftly inserts the knife... and twists it. You end up asking yourself what you were laughing at and why. It challenges your preconceptions. So, the takeaway at the end of Steven's show is: What do I think? How would I have behaved in that situation? At what point do you intervene in either a workplace or a social setting when you've clocked something that makes you think "Is that right? Should I interfere? What's appropriate? What's inappropriate?" Steven is seriously funny... and I use both words advisedly. Chef's kiss.

Karen Gillan is Madeline Crow

You and Steven have been discussing Douglas Is Cancelled for a while, haven't you?

A: Yes. I first read this about six years ago. As soon as I read it, I badgered Steven to make it. I told him, "This is incredible! This absolutely has to be made!" This was actually prior to any of the dramas like The Morning Show or Bombshell that touch on the same themes. Then eventually, he came back to me saying, "We're going to make this as a four-part series for ITV. Would you like to play Madeline?" "Yes, of course!" So I feel like I did my little bit to manifest Madeline for myself.



How would you characterise Madeline?

Where to even begin with Madeline? She started off as a very determined young girl who set her sights on getting into this particular industry. She was a huge fan of Douglas. She grew up watching him. She would rather watch him on TV than cartoons - she was a strange child like that! And then, she just dedicated her whole life to pursuing that. She went through a few experiences along the way that shaped her, and she quickly realised that she needed to harden up a little bit. She needed to put a guard up as she was exposed to more and more things within the industry. And so, when we meet her at the start of this drama, you just can't quite get a read on her. The idea is that you don't quite know what her motivations are, and you don't quite know whether you can trust her or not. That was really fun to play.

Is Madeline based on any real-life TV personality?

No. I didn't take inspiration from any particular person. She is just a cocktail of all the women on British television I watched growing up.

Did you do a lot of research into Madeline's world?

I don't think I sat down and researched it because I've been watching it my whole life. Growing up in Britain, those faces are so unbelievably familiar to us. My dad would always have the news on. So I feel pretty well-versed in the vibe of the whole thing. Then it was just more of a case of really understanding the emotions behind all of those characters.

How do you find it working with Hugh?

It was brilliant! Oh, my God, he's just so talented. He could just do the role – he was so natural. He's the perfect casting for this part. And it was fun. He's really mischievous and cheeky. I just had a really good time working with him. My character really knows how to play him and manipulate him and wrap him around her finger. That was great fun to play.

Was it a pleasure working with so many old friends from Doctor Who?

Absolutely. I felt like I was coming home. It felt really comforting and familiar. Starting a new job is always terrifying, but it was so nice to have the comfort of thinking “These are people that I love. So they're not going to let me be terrible in it.” Working with Alex is my absolute favourite just because she's got such a fun vibe on set. My favourite thing is just to ask her to tell a story about her life because you're always going to get something wonderful. She's the gift that keeps on giving in terms of anecdotes. She's amazing because she's done so much, but also because she's worked with so many incredible people. Alex is such a life force. She has definitely got that aura about her. Then on top of that, she is also an incredibly talented actress. She's just got such power to her.



What is so special about Steven's writing?

He is one of my favourite screenwriters. He can give you a zinger like no one's business. It feels like there's great showmanship to his work. It has a verbal gymnastics type of vibe. So with Steven, you get writing that's really funny and has tremendous flair, but is also completely realistic. That's what I am such a fan of. I dropped out of drama school after two months, so a lot of my acting training happened on Doctor Who. And so I felt incredibly familiar with the rhythms of Steven's writing. So as soon as I returned to it, I was like, "Oh, I know how to do this. I've got this."

What is your view of social media?

The main emotions that exist on X or Twitter are anger and frustration. Everything that does well on that platform elicits those feelings from you. You get roped into feeling angry about something, and I don't think that's very healthy all the time. But people are now being held more accountable for what they say, and that is definitely a positive that's come out of this.

Where does this rank in the list of productions you've ever done?

This is definitely my favourite project of all time. I think that's partially because it's the hardest thing I've ever done. Having to memorise that much dialogue was unbelievably challenging. One episode is almost entirely in an interview setting, and we're just sitting down and talking to each other. That's an hour that you have to fill with just talking. So that's a lot of talk! That was just scary for me. I feel like the hardest thing for me to do as a person is to sit down and talk. I have a lot of jittery, nervous energy that I like to channel into moving around or a big emotion. So in that particular episode, I didn't have anything to hide behind. I just had to sit there and be in it and do the thing that really scares me. And so it felt really nice to walk through the fire of something that was terrifying to me. It felt like doing a play. There was so much dialogue, and also so much that was not being said between the two characters. I just loved it. It was an acting dream.

Alex Kingston is Sheila Bellows

What appealed to you about Douglas Is Cancelled?

I'd say what appealed first of all was that the piece was written by Steven Moffat. I would do anything that Steven wrote because he's just such a brilliant writer. The characters he creates are such a delight to play. I've had that experience of working with him on Doctor Who. It was just a joy to read the script. I laughed out loud. I even cried with laughter in some places. It's so superbly written.



Were you also taken by the idea of playing opposite Hugh?

Absolutely. Oh my gosh, Hugh and I have worked together many times over the years. We go way back to literally when we were teenagers. And so, I was definitely attracted by the opportunity of working with Hugh again. We already have that shorthand between us. That relationship doesn't need even to be acted because we know each other so well and are so comfortable in each other's presence. It's not a new person who I've got to get to know, so that married relationship was already a given. I was thrilled to have the chance to do that.

How would you describe Sheila?

She is amoral, she is ruthless. But I'm assuming that's what the paper wants. I'm also guessing that in the world these sorts of people inhabit, in order to get a good story, they have to be prepared to throw even their best friends under the bus. To be in that position as the editor of a national newspaper, you've got to be not only incredibly ambitious, but also, I would imagine, highly-strung because you are carrying a lot of responsibility on your shoulders. It's just a joy to play somebody who's so on the front foot. Sheila is also really inappropriate. That's what's so great about the script because all the characters behave inappropriately in a world where we're supposed not to anymore. I don't feel like I'm that sort of person at all, which is why it was great fun to play!

How would you summarise the relationship between Sheila and Douglas?

I would definitely say that she wears the trousers in the household. What's so interesting is that they are this high-powered celebrity couple at the start of the story. He is the nation's favourite news broadcaster, and she's this very, very successful editor of a hugely popular newspaper. But I rather like the scene that Steven wrote for them where they are on holiday because that shows a little bit more of who they are as a family before all the stuff hits the fan. They are a unit, and they love each other. But it is an unusual marriage. She is very strong, and he just allows her to be like that. If Douglas was a similar personality to Sheila, the marriage wouldn't ever have lasted. But he just lets her sail on forward, and he's in her slipstream being dragged along.

How does Sheila get on with her daughter?

The relationship she has with her daughter Claudia is much more volatile because her daughter is actually a bit more like Sheila. She's got a bit more fight in her. In a way, Sheila is terrorised by her daughter as she can't hold her daughter down. Also, Sheila doesn't understand young people and all these words like “boomer” that drop out of their mouths. For Sheila, it's just so frustrating. She thinks, “Who is this person we brought into the world who seems like a creature from another planet?”

The drama has lots of very topical things to say about cancel culture.

Yes. It's really interesting because Steven originally conceived this as a stage play several years ago. That's what I found so brilliant and so prescient about it. Steven was working on this way before all the recent scandals involving popular broadcasters. Obviously, cancel culture was already swirling around then, but I feel like Steven has the courage to put the conversation on the table in a way that is super important. But he does it in a darkly comic way, which allows people watching to laugh, but hopefully also to be able to have conversations and ask questions such as, “Where are we going with this? And how dangerous is this becoming?”

What do you hope audiences might take away from Douglas Is Cancelled?

I hope people will be a little bit more thoughtful and a little bit more careful about how they treat people or what they say about people. We need to be more conscious and kinder and aware of other people's feelings and how they wish to be perceived in life. But I think some men of my generation struggle with having to make those changes. I certainly remember sitting in the pub as a young person and hearing jokes about women that were awful. Men would safely say horrendous stuff. But that's just how it was, and you just had to suck it up. But men cannot behave like that anymore. I think there are still elements of our generation that struggle to remember to be a little bit more thoughtful before they say something. That's not out of malice. It's because they're still trying to learn the new rules of the world.

After many years working together on Doctor Who, how did you find it being reunited with Karen?

It was a real joy. It was great just spending time with her. It was very funny because she played my mother in Doctor Who. So it was really lovely to do something different with Karen, and for us both to explore this new relationship together. In Douglas Is Cancelled, there is one big scene that we have together in the toilet. They're these two alpha females who are prowling around each other, and they both absolutely know each other's game.

Did all the cast get to hang out together on set as well?

Yes. When everybody came together for the grand finale, we ended up sitting in the studio control room between scenes, all just chatting, reminiscing, sharing, messing around. Working on Douglas Is Cancelled was just a lovely, lovely, lovely experience.



Ben Miles is Toby Patterson

What made you so keen to be part of Douglas Is Cancelled?

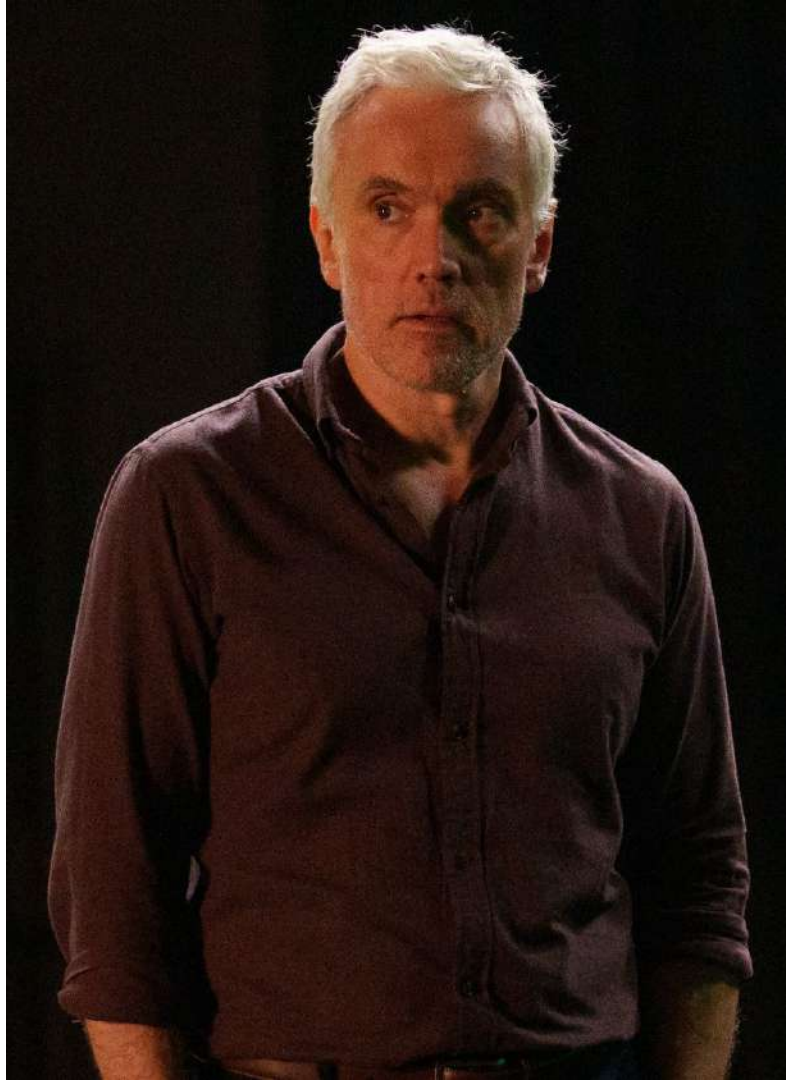
A: Many things. The team, for a start. I've got a great history with Steven Moffat and Sue Vertue. When I worked with them on Coupling, it was a really happy time. Steven is a really gifted writer. Not only is he very funny, but he also deals with topics, as shown in Douglas Is Cancelled, which are contentious, difficult, important and anything but funny, in a very sophisticated way. He handles subjects in a way that is comic, but also thought-provoking, challenging and beautifully constructed. He is an absolute master of construction. He's a great writer, and the minute I heard he was writing it, my ears pricked up. It's a really smart show.

What other elements made you eager to be involved?

A: Sue Vertue the producer, who just makes everything feel like you're not really at work. On her productions, it's always a family affair, and everybody's friends. The atmosphere on the set was just fantastic. Sue makes it look really, really easy, but I know she works extremely hard. Also, Ben Palmer is a brilliant director of comic drama, and I was really excited at the prospect of working with him.

Were you also enticed by the extremely strong cast?

A: Absolutely. The cast is absolutely fabulous: Hugh, Karen, Alex, Nick and of course, my dear friend Simon Russell Beale - he was an absolute joy. All these people I've watched and admired for years – the chance to work with them was really exciting. The high-calibre cast Steven attracted just shows you the quality of his scripts.



What else made you want to sign up for Douglas Is Cancelled?

Last but not least, the subject matter. All this stuff needs to be talked about and dramatised in the right way. I thought this was a very clever way of discussing a topic which needs exposure. So I was delighted when they said, “We would like you to do it.” It was an absolute no-brainer. It's been a real highlight for me.

Tell us about the character you play in Douglas Is Cancelled.

The Toby we meet at the beginning is a man who is in a position of great authority. He is a successful media producer, with a team of people that he rules over. While he's not necessarily a tyrant, he's a successful male in the world of media, with all that brings. He is pretty ruthless. He knows what he wants. He's quite cynical, sharp, and intelligent. He is very self-assured. But he believes he's younger and hipper than he actually is. He thinks he can still charm the young women in the office. But in reality, they think he's a bit of a joke. We've all met those people, right?

Talk us through the relationship between Toby and Douglas.

There's a clash of egos there. There's a dynamic between them where Douglas is the alpha, he's the star of the show. But Toby knows that he is the puppet master. He believes that he is in fact the alpha, but he still has to manage Douglas's foibles because Douglas is the star. Over after-hours drinks in a hotel bar, Toby would tell you that he is the mastermind behind this and that Douglas would have been no one were it not for his talent. So there's that battle going on between them. Toby thinks Douglas is actually a bit of an idiot, and vice versa. But they tolerate each other because they need each other in order to maintain their standing in the industry. While they need each other, they don't particularly like each other. But they know there's a mutual dependence. So they play the game of being great mates.

What are the traits that make Steven such a tremendous writer?

He is such an engaging person. He is also fearless. He won't shy away from things that need to be talked about. He also has a kind of recklessness – he seems very confident in his own style. I can't think of a voice like his. There is this particular tone to Steven's writing which is quite anarchic and risky. It pushes boundaries. He is a great master at showing how men lie. He portrays the knots men tie themselves in, in order to, in their opinion, save face and not appear the bad guy. But the more they do that, the worse things get. One of Steven's great themes is how stupid men are. They convince themselves that they're doing the right thing when they're really doing the wrong thing.

What will the takeaway from Douglas Is Cancelled be?

I hope viewers come away from it having debates with their friends and their family or realising things about themselves that maybe they either didn't know or refused to admit. I hope people will be entertained by it, of course, and I think they undoubtedly will be. But I hope audiences will talk about it as well. Hopefully, also people who are in a position to do something about the state of affairs that this show describes will have a think and maybe try to change some things. All in all, I hope the show gets people thinking as well as laughing and shouting at the TV. I keep imagining the reaction to Douglas Is Cancelled on Gogglebox. If the show was discussed on Gogglebox, that would be pretty good!



Nick Mohammed is Morgan

What instantly hooked you about Douglas Is Cancelled?

Steven Moffat's phenomenal script. As soon as I saw that it had been written by Steven, I wanted to be part of it. I read all four episodes like it was a thriller. It was a complete page-turner and I simply adored it. It just had this really fun, fast-paced energy to it. I also thought it would be really fun to play a comedy writer because obviously that's something I do myself. It also felt like the drama had so much to say about #MeToo as well, about how women are treated within the industry, and about the whole culture surrounding social media and cancel culture – with all of it just spiralling out of control. I just thought it was so witty and satirical, but making a really serious point at the same time. It was just brilliant. It also had such a great cast. I knew that Hugh and Karen were already attached to it, who I adore. I also knew that Ben Palmer was directing, who is always fantastic and who I'd been desperate to work with. So saying yes to this was a no-brainer really!



Can you elaborate on Morgan, the character you play?

Well the script is worryingly accurate. The real world of comedy is sadly not hugely dissimilar to the way Steven portrays it. And it's a world I've been privy to for the last however many years. Comedy writers, and specifically those who only write and don't perform are quite a specific breed. Morgan doesn't quite get social cues, probably because he doesn't tend to interact with anyone other than the people within his relatively niche comedy circle – and that's a problem. He has a certain way of talking down to people, patronising people, and obviously there's an inherent sexist streak to him in the way he thinks and talks about women.

Where do we find Morgan at the beginning of the series?

He's part of the comedy furniture really. He's your go-to guy for one-liners. He's the kind of person who's probably been running someone's Twitter account or writing gags for whoever is hosting the BAFTAs. Now he's been called in to interact with the news team to help solve a problem, so he's quite buoyed up by the whole thing. He sees it as a big opportunity to impress and to get his gags out there. But of course, because he's part of such a niche group, Morgan is very narrow-minded. He's black and white about what's funny and what's not funny and how jokes need to be delivered or sound. He's stubborn and feels that he knows comedy better than anyone else. In a nutshell, he's pretty arrogant and just completely deluded.

Steven's script is very timely, isn't it?

Definitely. We're living in a time when anyone can have an opinion, and of course there's nothing wrong with that per se. But I guess what social media has done is weaponize opinions. It gives access to absolutely everyone, regardless of their view, to put their message out there with the potential for it to spread like wildfire. Cancel culture, whether you agree with it or not, is something that everyone is dealing with at the moment. Whether you're in the public eye on the receiving end of it or whether you're part of the mob trying to get someone, something or some idea cancelled, or even if you're just someone innocently seeing how it might play out from a distance – it's become part of our culture and it can be very divisive. So yes, Steven's script is completely on the pulse.

How does the drama tackle the subject?

I think Douglas Is Cancelled does such a great job of showing all sides of it. It also highlights the craziness and the speed at which things can spiral out of control. It portrays how you have corporations and businesses and senior figures trying to play catch-up. But in doing so, they are often just digging themselves a bigger grave and it quickly becomes quite farcical. Not to lighten the very serious issues involved, but Steven has allowed us to laugh where we need to laugh. And then suddenly we get a gut punch of, "Oh, crikey, no, this is something very, very serious and really needs addressing." So that's why I think it's such a great piece.

How do you hope viewers will react to Douglas Is Cancelled?

I hope it makes people sit up a little and think about where they stand on the whole cancel culture debate. I also hope it makes them question how they interact with social media. Everyone thinks, "Oh, it doesn't matter if I say the odd thing on social media." But you times that by a million people, and suddenly it's a major issue. I think the drama makes a very important point in terms of systemic misogyny as well. I hope that it makes viewers really think about what is acceptable in the workplace, what is 'banter', what is clearly overstepping the mark and really addressing how we individually deal with that and not simply just thinking, "Oh, that's someone else's problem." There needs to be a wholesale cultural shift in society.

Have you enjoyed working with this tremendous cast?

Absolutely. Not to name drop, but it was Jason Sudeikis, who I worked with on Ted Lasso, who said, "You're only as good as the people you're acting with." And that is always so unquestionably true. And Douglas Is Cancelled is no exception.

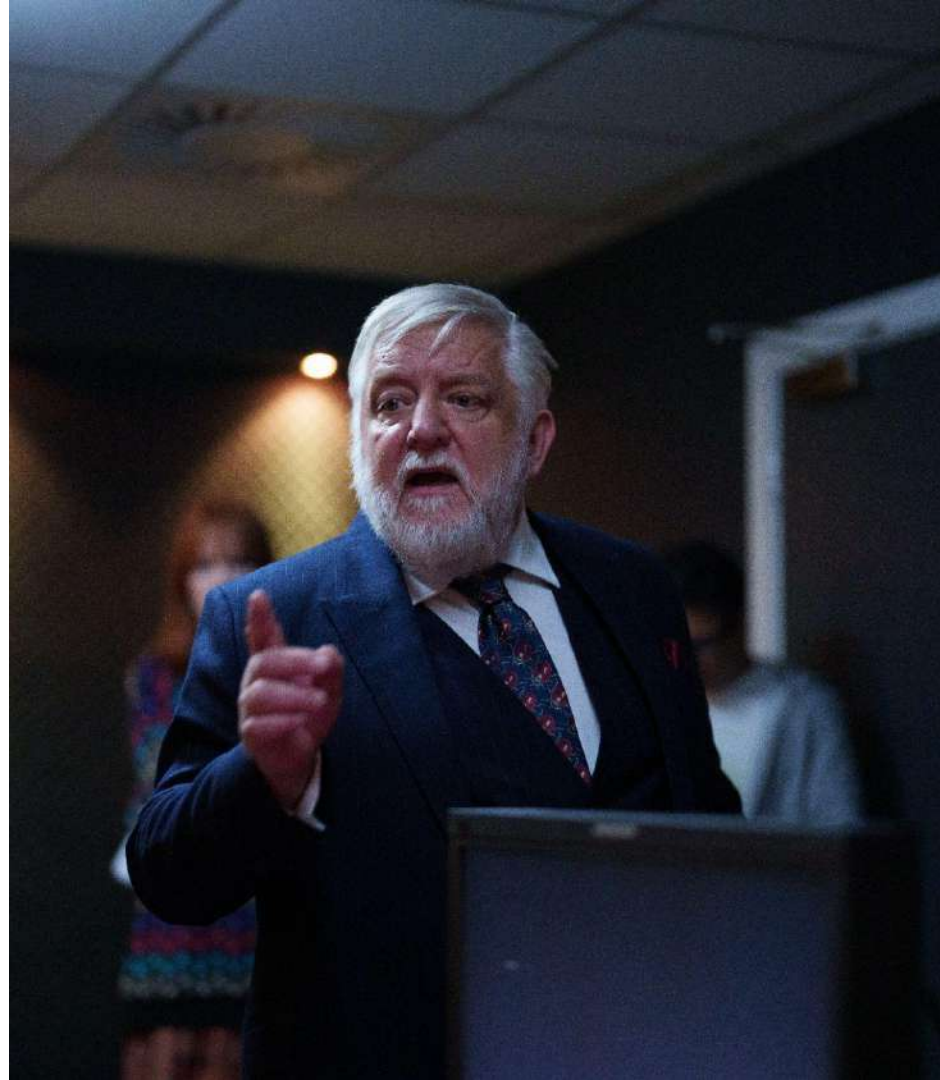
Simon Russell Beale is Bently Cassock

Why was Douglas Is Cancelled a project you wanted to be involved with?

A: The first thing is, it's very funny, and it's very sharp. Steven writes genuinely good jokes. They're beautifully constructed. There were several bits that made me laugh out loud. But it's also serious. Steven doesn't skirt around the issues at all. It's just a really good script. It makes you laugh, it makes you think, and it makes you sad.

Can you run us through Bently's characteristics?

A: I immediately understood him. I didn't base him on any particular person, but I knew exactly the sort of man that Steven was writing. Bently is lazy. He's always pretending he knows more than he does. He's at the end of his career. He's made quite a lot of money - obviously, because he's about to build a gazebo at his house! But he hasn't really caught up with the way the modern world works. It's all a bit beyond him. He also behaves ruthlessly if it's in his own interest. He has no compunction about saying to Douglas, "If something goes wrong, I'll strike you off my books at the first opportunity." He's not like any agent that I know. He is such an idiot!



How would you sum up the relationship between Bently and Douglas?

It's complicated. At one point, Douglas says something like, "I'm not going to have you back again, just because you're outside my house crying in the garden." It always struck me that that moment suggested that there is actually a sentimental attachment between them. For all Bently's lack of skill and selfishness, they do like each other. It's also always a funny relationship between agents and actors. You don't quite know where the power balance lies. I've always found the idea of sacking your agent very difficult because to me they're the boss. But I don't imagine Douglas thinks like that. He would get rid of Bently if he wanted to. So Douglas holds the upper hand in that sense. Douglas makes Bently money, but there must also be an emotional component to their relationship.

The script is very topical, isn't it?

Definitely. I didn't realise Steven started this six years ago. So it's obviously been around in his head. It's quite interesting that he'd already established that this was an issue. He's hit the nail on the head because so many people are talking about it now, many more than were six years ago.

What was the experience of working with Hugh like?

It was wonderful. Although we've never worked together before, I've known him for ages. I first heard of him when I was 17. Both our fathers were medical people, and I remember my father saying, "So and so's son is a brilliant actor." I recall a stab of envy as I was in the car with Dad and thinking, "Oh, right, OK." Hugh has also worked with Sam Mendes who I work with a lot. And so, he's always been around and we have seen each other quite a bit over the years. So even though this is the first time we've actually worked together, we were immediately comfortable with each other. It was completely easy to sit down and just talk to Hugh because he's incredibly generous. If you look at his face, you'd expect him to be very generous, and he is. He has a real warmth, and there was great chemistry between us. He made me laugh, too. It's always a good sign if somebody makes you laugh, and Hugh does that. He does that bemused look so brilliantly. He's a master of bemusement.

Did you enjoy working with the director Ben Palmer?

Yes, he was excellent. He understands comedy, which is rare. It's a very underrated skill. We all acknowledge the brilliance of people who do serious stuff. But comedy is really hard to get right. I quickly trusted Ben's comic instinct. His ear is so well attuned to comedy.

You have had a marvellous career in the theatre. Do you regard stage acting as very different from screen acting?

No. Now I don't see them as different. The theory used to be that you should pull down your stage acting on screen. The idea was that it had to be underplayed on film. But I remember years ago, Emma Thompson said, "Actually, that's not true. You don't have to do that, if that's not the character's intention." The one thing to remember is that film acting is essentially about getting a thought behind the eyes. You can do very little, as long as the audience can see you thinking.

How do you hope audiences will respond to Douglas Is Cancelled?

It's a pretty acute commentary on where we are, and I hope it will make people think and will maybe make them a bit kinder. If it makes people reflect on their behaviour, that that would be a very good outcome. The way the world's going at the moment, viewers will inevitably make comparisons with our current situation. But as I was saying to a friend the other day, I don't think human beings have changed very much. Everything's just a bit quicker these days!



Creatives Interviews

Interview with screenwriter Steven Moffat

Is Douglas is Cancelled based on recent real-life media scandals?

Absolutely not. It's not based on any actual incident. I first wrote it as a play several years ago before the #MeToo movement had even begun. At the time I wrote it, we would have pointed to a different set of examples of bad behaviour. This is a story that keeps repeating itself. So yes, people will compare this drama to real-life incidents, but there are honestly no comparisons to be made. However, the drama does exist in a world in which all that *has* happened. Douglas will remember that those people have got into trouble recently and worry that he could be next.

What attracted you to this subject matter, then?

When I started writing it, I thought it was a dynamite subject that would make a great play. I was fascinated by the inter-human politics of it. I'd also been wanting to write about how people bully other people. We know about the form of bullying which is, "I'm going to get you behind the bike sheds." That's just school! Everyone gets that. But as you grow up, people still bully each other in the workplace. There's a scene, for example, where Sheila's assistant is bullying her. Who is exercising the power there? I'm just fascinated by all those things.

What does the drama have to say about social media?

There is a toxic element to social media, but I think you have to be careful not to say there's *only* a toxic element. If you are intelligent about how you use it, and many people are, you'll be watching cat videos and exchanging jokes and getting recommendations for TV shows. Because my Facebook has a tremendously high opinion of me, I get quotes from Bertrand Russell, information about architecture, poetry and recently science. This is the highest opinion that anyone has ever had of me - and I'm delighted by it! I have genuinely learned lots of lovely things on social media. However, and this is the critical point, the downside is not the fault of Twitter or X or Facebook or any of those things. It's the fault of the people who use it. You do not use Twitter for moral discourse or arguments about things that matter to real human beings. It is stripped of nuance and empathy and insight. It doesn't work. Social media can be fun, and it can be informative. But it's not the job of the world to keep itself safe for you. It's your job to keep yourself safe in it.

Has social media encouraged people to be outraged?

Yes. Television, and all of us in it, me included, have created an appetite for excitement and an immediate hit of outrage, and “Oh my god!” The way in which the headline rarely reflects the story is awful. As Sheila points out, nobody ever reads the article. You just get that big, silly headline, and that's what worms itself into your brain. However, we can all be grown-ups if we want. We don't actually have to be lazy and lie on our backs and feed on it all. Even among friends of mine who I consider to be intelligent, the idea has taken hold that you're supposed to join one gang or the other. But nothing could be more destructive. No argument in history didn't have points on both sides. That's how it got to be an argument. Every human being who ever lived is massively flawed and has done things they regret. So finding those things out shouldn't change your opinion of anything since you already knew that if you're a grown-up. But all of that capacity to take sides and make snap judgements, I think, is what we're prone to.

Is cancel culture a new phenomenon?

No. We've always had cancel culture, but we didn't have a name for it. #MeToo and cancellation was happening as I was writing it, but cancellation is not new. It is literally 1000s of years old. Tell Socrates or Jesus that it's new. There's nothing new about it at all.

What does Hugh offer as Douglas?

First of all, he is a superlative actor. He can spin the humour out of any line. Also, he is a national treasure, and he's supposed to be playing a national treasure. So that works. It's always weird when you've got somebody not very famous playing a fictional character who is very famous. That always feels very wrong. Whereas Hugh Bonneville has roughly the stature of Douglas Bellows.

What does Karen add to the role of Madeline?

She's just brilliant. It's a proper workout for her. She gets to be the hero, the villain, the victim, the conqueror, the emotional wreck, and the ice queen - sometimes all in one scene. It's a cracking part, and she plays it superbly.

Douglas Is Cancelled features many strong female characters, doesn't it?

Yes. there have been, for perfectly good reasons, a lot of dramas where men are portrayed as being as monstrous, as they often are, and then women get the glorious role of being the victim, the poor, quivering damsel in distress. But that's not what goes on in the real world. Women often give as good as they get. I happen to know, including my wife, an awful lot of powerful women. And I know some of the things they've had to put up with and with what skill and accomplishment they've had to deal with it. I also occasionally get glimpses, especially with Sue, but with other women, too, of how angry they are about some of it. Their anger can be directed in certain ways at people like Douglas or me, who get a position of safety and command by being apparently rather helpless. But there is nothing more dominant or more powerful than being helpless and hapless and everybody having to look after you. Douglas owns the room by being, "Oh, I don't know. Well, gosh, silly old me." That is a very good technique to get everybody running around after you. That's the behaviour of a Roman Emperor.

What you hope the takeaway will be?

There is a lot of humour in it. There are a lot of cliffhangers in it, and there's a lot of entertainment in it. But it is also the kind of show where you want people to be arguing about it afterwards. I would like to think they would be good-humoured arguments because there's absolutely nobody who's an angel in this show at all. At all!

Interview with Executive Producer, Sue Vertue

What is the drama's take on cancel culture?

It's so easy to get yourself cancelled. Anybody could say something, even if they didn't believe it, and they could be cancelled. I tend to stay away from social media more and more now. Sometimes I think, "Did I say anything wrong there? No, I think everything I said was fine. Nobody can find anything to be offended about in what I've just said." And then somebody will find something to be offended about, whatever you say. So the safest option is just not to go there at all as what you say could be misinterpreted. I think a lot of it is bullying. What Steven covers really well in this series is the amount of micro-bullying that goes on from all the characters.

What is your view of cancel culture?

I think it's scary because I'm not entirely sure what people want to get out of it. I think there's a lot of, "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." It gathers momentum and people will go along with it. It's safer to agree with it than it is to stand up and go, "I don't agree with that." The safest way to not to be the target of the mob is to join the mob. Don't be at the front of the mob just to be in the middle of it somewhere. It's awful. It's the pack chasing blood. It is like a very weird sport. I don't know how they can have university debating societies now. I don't know how you can say something that other people don't necessarily agree with and get away with it.

Is one of the drawbacks of social media that it doesn't do nuance?

Yes. Nuance is a bit old-fashioned. These days you're forced to have an opinion. You have to be either for something or against it, even if you've got no strong opinion about it either way. When our parents grew up, nobody knew how they voted and nobody knew really what they thought about quite a lot of things. And now we have to say what we know about everything and vote for or against it, even if we don't have a strong view on it.

What does Hugh bring to the role of Douglas?

He was Ben Palmer's suggestion. Once he was in our head, we couldn't think of anybody else at all, so actually we waited for him. He's so believable. One of the lifts at ITV is covered by a picture of Hugh and Karen as Douglas and Madeline in "Live at Six". It just feels like a TV show that's already up and running. Hugh's got such a lovable face, and so you just feel so let down by him – "I just didn't think you were capable of it at all!" Hugh loves the show, but even he says it's quite uncomfortable watching it.

Why does Karen work so well as Madeline?

Karen has always been connected to this because she read the play six years ago. She brings this vulnerability and this strength. We haven't seen that much of Karen on British TV since Doctor Who because she is now a Hollywood star. So I don't think people have seen the depth of her dramatic acting. I cried at her scenes towards the end. She's also got this steely confidence at the beginning. You think, "I just don't know what's going on behind those eyes."

What are Ben Palmer's strength as a director?

He's superb. He's done a lot of comedy, so he brought that pace to the production. He is also very well-prepared. He rehearsed every single scene of the show. Steven and I are quite annoying in that we're always there on the shoot. We always have a conversation with the director beforehand to let them know that Steven will be there quite a lot. Some directors don't really like writers being there that much, but Ben loved it. He was actually was very insistent that Steven should be there. He is one of those directors who doesn't want you to leave the studio floor because he really wants you to feed in. But Ben is also extraordinarily vigilant in ensuring that he gets it exactly right. So even if we're saying, "Yes, that's close enough," he goes, "No, no, no. Those lift doors didn't quite work. We have to shoot that scene again."

What else does Ben offer as a director?

He's really thorough. We had long conversations beforehand about the style of shooting. In the end, we shot it with anamorphic lenses, which we have never done before. But it was because Ben wanted a difference in the depth of field. And so, we really have a lot of conversations in prep about the look of the piece, which was great. There's nothing worse than turning up and saying to the director, "Oh God, you're going to shoot it like that? No one told us!"

What do you hope audiences will be saying to each other after watching Douglas Is Cancelled?

I'd like them to have a big conversation at the end of it about who the baddie was because I think it's very nuanced. There's a whole discussion to be had about that. I just hope viewers get more of an understanding about why people behave the way they behave.

Episode Summaries

EPISODE ONE

"What happened to the presumption of innocence?"

"It's too slow for the news cycle."

TV presenter Douglas faces the backlash of a sexist joke made at a wedding, as his co-host Madeline accidentally amplifies the situation. But was it an accident?

EPISODE TWO

"Do you know what the rich and famous have instead of enemies? Friends"

The furore around the joke continues. Douglas needs to be coached on how to handle the questions he's facing. But who should do the coaching? His wife or his co-presenter?

EPISODE THREE

"Would it surprise you to know I consider myself a feminist?"

"Yes."

When Madeline Crow and Douglas Bellows met for the first time, the encounter took an unexpected turn. Now, three years later, there are explosive consequences.

EPISODE FOUR

"This job is worth it. Whatever you have to wade through, it really is worth it."

The furore around the joke continues. Douglas needs to be coached on how to handle the questions he's facing. But who should do the coaching? His wife or his co-presenter?



ABOUT HARTSWOOD FILMS

Hartwood Films creates landmark drama and comedy for leading platforms and broadcasters across the world. The Company is led by CEO / Executive Producer Sue Vertue and Writer / Showrunner Steven Moffat. Previous productions include the BBC / Netflix production *Dracula* from Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss and Sky's award-winning Christmas drama *Road to Nowhere*. Moffat and Gatiss were responsible for the company's Emmy, RTS and BAFTA winning internationally successful series *Sherlock* starring Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman. A long history of comedies at Hartwood include *Men Behaving Badly* and *Coupling*. Recent dramas include: 'The Control Room', starring Iain de Caestecker (for BBC1) *Inside Man* (BBC/Netflix) and *The Time Traveller's Wife* for HBO.

The Company is currently in production on series 3 of 'The Devil's Hour' starring Jessica Raine and Peter Capaldi (for Amazon Prime)

Hartwood was founded in 1979 by the legendary producer Beryl Vertue, business manager and agent to some of television's greatest comedy creators. The company's history is rooted in many of the best-loved British and American comedies of TV's first golden age. That unique history is the platform on which they continue to produce some of today's most beloved scripted television.

PRODUCTION CREDITS:

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EXECUTIVE PRODUCER.....	SUE VERTUE
DIRECTOR.....	BEN PALMER
PRODUCER.....	LAWRENCE TILL
DIRECTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY.....	NICK MARTIN
CO-PRODUCER.....	RACHEL STONE
LINE PRODUCER.....	MENZIES KENNEDY
SCRIPT SUPERVISOR.....	SAM DONOVAN
CASTING DIRECTOR.....	SARAH CROWE
COSTUME DESIGNER.....	ROSA DIAS
MAKE UP & HAIR DESIGNER.....	NOSH OLDHAM
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PROPS MASTER.....	SIMON BRADBURY-PHILIPS
FIRST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR.....	DAVID CHALSTREY
SECOND ASSISTANT DIRECTOR.....	ANTONIA CARTER
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