

Until I Kill You



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UNTIL I KILL YOU - PRESS RELEASE

The extraordinary true story of Delia Balmer, who survived a near-fatal relationship with murderer John Sweeney, is the subject of a new four-part drama, *Until I Kill You*, commissioned by ITV's Head of Drama Polly Hill from globally renowned ITV Studios label, World Productions.

BAFTA-winning actress Anna Maxwell Martin (*Motherland*, *A Spy Among Friends*) takes the role of Delia Balmer, and renowned actor and director Shaun Evans (*Endeavour*, *Vigil*) plays John Sweeney. *Until I Kill You* will premiere on ITV1 and ITVM.

Based on Delia Balmer's memoir, *Living with a Serial Killer*, *Until I Kill You* is written by Nick Stevens (*The Pembrokeshire Murders*), and executive produced by multi-award winning World Productions CEO, Simon Heath (*Save Me*, *Line of Duty*, *Anne*). Delia Balmer narrates the ordeal Delia suffered at the hands of John Sweeney, and her traumatic journey through the police and criminal justice system as they attempt to prosecute him for his crimes.

The series has been commissioned for ITV by Polly Hill and Drama Commissioner, Huw Kennair Jones. Huw will oversee production of the drama from ITV's perspective.

In 1991 Delia leads an itinerant and solitary life in London working as an agency nurse. When she meets fellow free-spirit John Sweeney in a local pub, it seems like the connection she has been searching for.

As the relationship develops, Sweeney's artistic, anti-establishment persona gives way to a darker side, culminating in a series of violent attacks on Delia, during which he tells her he killed his former girlfriend and disposed of her body in an Amsterdam canal.

Sweeney is arrested but, due to a catastrophic failure to realise how dangerous he is, granted bail. He very quickly pursues Delia and subjects her to a horrific, near-fatal attack. She survives, but Sweeney evades capture and disappears.

Shattered by the trauma and injuries inflicted by Sweeney, Delia bravely seeks to rebuild her life. But Sweeney returns seven years later and is arrested for the murder of another girlfriend in North London. Delia's fragile recovery is shattered all over again as she has to face Sweeney in open court, her testimony vital to the prosecution case against him.

This is the story of one woman's astonishing will to survive through physical and emotional torment, despite the failings of the institutions which were meant to protect her.

The Producer is Ken Horn (*The Devil's Hour*, *Line of Duty*, *The Diplomat*) and the Director is Julia Ford (*Everything I Know About Love*, *The Bay*).

Nick Stevens is renowned for his work in the true crime genre and has been responsible for writing the hugely successful *The Pembrokeshire Murders*, a three-part drama starring Luke Evans which won the Welsh BAFTA for Drama in 2022. Nick also collaborated with World Productions on *In Plain Sight*, a drama about Scottish serial killer Peter Manuel, starring Martin Compston and Douglas Henshall, which won the RTS Scotland Best Drama Award in 2017.

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World Productions has blazed a trail of gripping, talk-about, contemporary TV that combines human stories with high stakes drama and genuine authenticity. Recent award-winning dramas include Line of Duty (BBC), Bodyguard (BBC), Vigil (BBC), The Gathering (C4), Anne (ITV), Save Me (Sky Atlantic) and The Pembrokeshire Murders (ITV). World are currently in production for 3 returning series (Malpractice 2 (ITV), Showtrial 2 (BBC) & Karen Pirie 2 (ITV)) and a new BBC/Netflix drama about the Lockerbie bombing will air in 2025.

Over the last four years, World Productions has twice been awarded Independent Production Company of the Year at the Broadcast Awards (where it was described as a “bonafide hit factory”) and Best Independent Production Company at the Edinburgh Television Festival Awards and recently won an International Emmy for Vigil.

Until I Kill You was produced in association with, and distributed internationally by, ITV Studios.

The production received support from the Welsh Government via Creative Wales.

Anna Maxwell Martin is Delia Balmer



INTERVIEW WITH ANNA MAXWELL MARTIN

What drew you to this series initially?

It was the character, the chance to play Delia. She's unlike anyone I've ever played before, she's an incredibly fascinating person and her responses to things are very particular to her. It was really interesting and liberating to play someone like Delia, who is unapologetically herself and gives herself licence to express everything she's thinking and feeling. That is an amazing quality and very few people are like that. I don't want to speak for her at all, but I think it absolutely informs just how resilient she is. That was thrilling for me to play.

Then it was about the people attached to the project – that's usually the first thing I look for, but actually this time it was the character that initially drew me in. You want to be around people who are not just talented, but also really good and decent, you don't want to have a miserable time on set. Julia Ford is such a lovely, capable, wonderfully kind director, who is very clear about what she wants, which I really like and she understands script and narrative arc. I definitely didn't want Delia's story to be sensationalised, and I just knew with Julia at the helm that wouldn't happen. Then Ken Horn, the producer, was someone I worked with on Line of Duty, so I knew he was a good person.

Did you have conversations with the real Delia before you started filming?

No, I've played quite a few real people and I have never met them before. I don't choose to do that, that's how I work. Our writer, Nick, filmed a lot of footage of his meetings with Delia, which I had access to. I did meet her very briefly during filming, but only because she wanted to visit the set and of course I was respectful of that. I didn't do lots of research into abusive relationships either, instead I just focussed on the character, on who she was, how she responded to things, and what I could gauge about how she interacted with people. Then you go from there and you try to be as accurate as you can in terms of how that person would behave and respond.

Had you worked with Shaun Evans before?

No but he's so lovely, he's a really super, kind person, I so enjoyed working with both him and Kevin Doyle. I'd worked with Kevin twice before, so he was a definitive choice for all of us, but I hadn't worked with Shaun.

There were lots of big conversations about who would play Sweeney, because I didn't want to make a big deal out of it, but I did feel there would be times when I would be quite vulnerable playing Delia. I hate saying things like that because of course what Delia has been through is horrific and it's just acting for me, but I was aware that there was nudity and violence in the series, and you don't want to be filming with an egomaniac in the room. You want to be with someone who is kind, funny and calm, which Shaun is. If you cast a collaborator then you're going to be respectful of the people you're playing and do a good job, and Shaun really understood that. It was really easy to do the difficult scenes because Shaun was so easy to work with, and he is also incredibly talented – he was frighteningly accurate as Sweeney.

Did you use an intimacy co-ordinator when portraying the abuse Delia endured?

We were offered one, and there was a lovely lady available to us, but we didn't use one in the end – Shaun and I work in quite a similar way, so we felt we didn't need an intimacy co-ordinator, but we needed a stunt co-ordinator a lot more.

INTERVIEW WITH ANNA MAXWELL MARTIN

Was it tough to film such dark scenes?

It's not like doing a 12-hour shift as a nurse, so I get embarrassed to say that. It's not a nice headspace to be in, but of course I get to step away from it. You have to keep a firm grip on the fact that it is not your reality – very sadly it was someone else's reality and it was really difficult for her. It's not nice, and I don't know how Shaun felt about playing someone like Sweeney. It affects you a little bit in the day, you wouldn't be doing your job properly if it didn't, but then you've got to get a firm grip on yourself, go home and be very thankful that you're not actually living any of those things.

You like to ensure there is a positive atmosphere on set, even when filming dark material, don't you?

That's the way I work – I couldn't handle being in character all day long, and even though there were lots of heavy scenes to do I didn't want a heavy atmosphere on set. That's where Shaun was really sweet, he just got on that bandwagon with me and I'm very grateful to him for that. Whatever story you're telling, you must be respectful of the people you're playing of course, and everyone was very focussed and brilliant in doing that. But you also have to be respectful of the fact that crews work very long hours, it can often be a very frenetic job and sets can get quite tense. I am really aware that everyone is doing long hours, so everyone should be able to have a nice time at work and a good working environment, I think that's really important.

Was it important to you that the series is told from Delia's perspective?

Yes, absolutely because we're also trying to say, "Wow look at this amazing woman" – she didn't take any crap, she's so resilient and fiery, such an individual, let's celebrate that rather than showing more gratuitous violence against females on TV. I think we're all a bit bored of watching that and following predatory male killers around on TV, I didn't really want to focus on the abuse. We're getting inside the mind of a woman who went through a lot of very complex things, not just to do with John Sweeney, and I'm very proud of the drama.

I was also really interested in the brutalising system Delia became a part of – the judicial system, the police system and what happened there.. It was difficult to read what happened to her. Lots of people are missed all the time and Delia was. She is an incredibly strong, capable person and I hope we challenge the idea that victims of violence are wobbling jellies in the corner – they aren't and it's important to understand that. Delia always maintained her strength and her view of things and she was very rarely cowed by people, she had incredible resilience.

Do you feel the drama is more powerful because it is based on a true story?

Yes, but also this series wouldn't have been made if it wasn't a true story. There are aspects of Delia's character that are quite extreme, so if I had written this character and taken the drama to a broadcaster they would have told me to tone it down or said they don't believe her as a character. But there was so much freedom when filming this, because Delia is an exceptionally interesting person and this is a true story.

How did you find filming in Swansea?

I love the Welsh people and we had a lovely crew, but this is all set literally around the corner from my house, so when I got it I thought, "Brilliant this is easy with the kids" – we're a single-parent family so I thought it would be great... and then they said we were going all the way to Swansea! But I was staying in the Mumbles and I had the kids down over Easter, which was heaven – we went swimming along the Gower Peninsula every day and it was gorgeous.

INTERVIEW WITH ANNA MAXWELL MARTIN

I always feel so lucky to do this job and I'm so grateful to come off a project like this and think, "That was a lovely job", especially in the past couple of years with what's happened in my life, I feel exceptionally grateful to still be working. I was surrounded by lovely people on this drama and actually I was quite moved, because it was the first time I'd left my kids to go away to work since my husband died, and I was looked after so well. Everyone was so kind to me all the time, from Julia, our director, to Callum, our runner, they were so sweet. So I do feel so lucky and grateful to be in this industry, doing really good work with good people, every department knocked it out the park.

Have you felt a shift in your career in the past few years, after your high-profile roles in Line of Duty and Motherland?

I've had fallow times in my career, when I've been trying to turn the tide – after Bleak House all I got offered was costume dramas, so I had to say no a few times, because I thought no-one else wanted to watch me in another costume drama! It's so easy to get pigeon holed and I've only ever wanted to play very different parts all of the time, I don't have any interest in looking or sounding like myself on screen.

Line of Duty has an exceptionally big audience, and all the gritty dramas I was doing when I was younger probably didn't have a very big audience. Then the Motherland phenomenon grew during Covid, it wasn't a massive show and then it became a really big thing in lockdown, which coincided with Line of Duty coming out, and people thought, "How can she do different things? Weird!" Even since then I keep trying to do different things and always do a project that is a new challenge. People are obsessed with Line of Duty and I loved playing Pat, she was an amazing character. I'd play Pat for the rest of my life, in fact I wish Jed would do the spin-off: "Pat" – not even Pat doing policing, just her doing other things like going to the shops!

Shaun Evans is John Sweeney



INTERVIEW WITH SHAUN EVANS

Can you talk about the series and your character?

The story that we are telling takes place over about 15 to 20 years, over the course of a woman's life - called Delia Balmer. It is essentially about how this woman fell victim in one of her personal relationships to coercive behaviour, gaslighting, domestic abuse and violence. She was ultimately let down by the judicial system until they really needed her as a linchpin in their case against the guy. That's basically the gist of the story.

Can you tell us a bit about John Sweeney?

John meets Delia at the beginning of our tale and they move in together. After a while things begin to go very badly wrong when there's a real movement within the relationship.

What research material was available to you?

I don't really work in that way to be honest with you. That's not to dismiss it, but that's just not what works for me personally. I think the imagination is limitless and I'm slightly more concerned with making the story that we're telling as believable as possible than the impression of somebody who may have existed. I think you have to invest on the day-to-day of what we're doing, so a lot of it was just imagination to be honest.

Is this the first time you've played a part that was based on a real character?

No, it's not the first time I've played a part based on a real character I've done it a few times before, never with such a graphic material though, and largely the people that I've played have already passed away. So this is the first time that it's still in recent memory, the events. That brings with it a lot of responsibility and obligation to be as fair as possible.

How was it working with Anna who plays Delia Balmer?

Working with Anna was fantastic and definitely one of the draws of the job. I have admired her for a long time, I think she is a fantastic actor. I saw her on stage about 10 or 15 years ago. She is brilliant. That's been one of the joys of this job, to be able to lock into one another as actors and do our work. The nature of the material can be quite dark and unpleasant but that being said, I feel like we've spent an enormous amount of time rolling about laughing just to try to keep the mood up and light. I've never done anything like this before and it's been a really interesting experience with lots of take aways from it. But Anna, she is fantastic, and the rest of the actors as well. The majority of my scenes were with Anna but everyone has been magnificent.

On the subject of Delia, she is a very complex and you could say unsympathetic character?

There's nothing wrong with being unsympathetic. I think there's a tendency often, when you're in meetings about jobs and story meetings, people want every character to be as sympathetic as possible and often, people aren't actually as sympathetic and they wear the wounds of the life that they have had and we shouldn't shy away from that. In terms of the question of why I think people will watch it, one of the draws perhaps could be it's rare in a story like this that you focus on the victim - that was one of the big things for me in this job - that in no way are we glorifying anyone, but actually we are focusing on someone who went through this ordeal and how she tried to build her life again. The violence at the beginning of the tale shouldn't be in any way fetishized, that's not what the story is about its incidental in a way but it's crucial to how she began to rebuild her life. For me, that's what is interesting about the tale and I hope the audience will find the same.

INTERVIEW WITH SHAUN EVANS

It's a very difficult subject for everybody to carry it off, was it a good experience working with Julia, the director?

Julia is fantastic – it was the first time we met in fact - but it's been a fantastic experience. Julia was an actress herself for a long time so she has that short hand with the actors. It's important that we have a female telling that story and navigating her way through that. It's been a really wonderful experience and aside Julia's brilliance as a director, she has a very warm, affable and nurturing atmosphere and that's really great when you're doing scenes that could potentially be quite difficult or tense.

Do you think this is an unusual TV programme for ITV to make?

I think so, perhaps. Like I said earlier, I think what's unusual about it and what drew me to it is that we are focusing on the victim and telling her story but not glorifying anybody else except the victim. You're getting into the weeds of what that was like after the event and that's what I think is interesting and that's what is agonising and painful about it. I think that's unusual for any broadcaster. If you look at the sort of things that have been made recently within the same genre, they are focusing more on the perpetrator and not the victim.

Kevin Doyle is David



INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN DOYLE

Why were you keen to be part of this drama?

I first heard about it as I was setting off to Canada to do a play in Toronto. We were just about to fly out when I got sent the script through. I very vaguely remembered the story from the news, and when they said who was involved with the project I didn't really need to read the script, I immediately said yes please, because I'd worked with Anna [Maxwell Martin] before, I'd worked with our director Julia [Ford] as an actor, and I'd always wanted to work with Shaun [Evans]. So, I knew I wanted to be part of it straight away – it always comes down to the people.

How would you describe your character, David?

He seems to me to be a very generous soul. He's aware that he is offering much more to the relationship than he is getting back, but he understands the reasons why, so he gives Delia a lot of leeway. I think he saw a wounded animal in Delia, and he felt that he could look after her and that in some way she could support him. They're both people of a certain age whose lives haven't necessarily gone in the ways they would have liked – he's divorced, he's got grown-up kids and he's quite lonely.

I'm not one of those actors who does a great deal of research if it isn't necessary and I didn't feel it was in this case, so I didn't find out lots more about David, but Julia set me straight on what she saw in the character. She said she wanted there to be something very calm and reassuring about him, and nice – she wanted as big a contrast as possible to the darkness Shaun was bringing as Sweeney. Given some of the parts I've played in the past, I can imagine the audience might see me on screen initially and think, "Oh God, Delia has met another one, she's going from the frying pan into the fire!". But no, David isn't like that.

There are aspects of David we diluted slightly, like the fact he was a very heavy smoker, but nevertheless Delia found comfort in the stability that David offered and he did seem to offer something loving. He was very generous with his time and his money, but nevertheless she just couldn't fully commit to the relationship and they lasted three or four years together.

How does David cope with the legacy of Sweeney's abuse?

He is absolutely supportive of Delia all the time and he is very keen to see Sweeney put away. That was actually the beginning of the breakdown of the relationship, because he wanted her to get fully involved in the police's attempt to imprison Sweeney, but she just wanted to back away from it and get on with her new life. He didn't insist on it, but he was always suggesting it would be the better route for her in the long term and she reluctantly went along with that in the end. It was to her cost to a certain extent, because you see in the court scenes that she feels very exposed by the cross-examination. It's something you see so often in high-profile cases of violence against women, it's absolutely brutal and you can understand why people like Delia don't want to put themselves through that. My understanding is that the police only realised far too late that what she was saying was the truth and Sweeney was a menace.

When I first heard about the role they only sent me the last two scripts, so I wasn't really very aware of what happened before my character David meets Delia. There were certain things implied that were pretty shocking, but what I read was the beginning of Delia's recovery. I didn't get all the really dark stuff until I started filming, and then I found out what that poor woman had endured for so long.

INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN DOYLE

Why is this an important story to tell?

It's important to show that although you can recover from the physical wounds that people like Delia experience, the mental wounds can actually be far harder to overcome in some ways. To this day, Delia finds it hard to trust people and I guess you never really recover from that. Whenever I read about people who survive experiences like this, that does seem to be a common thread – that you just don't trust anybody and you're terrified of going out, so even though you can function your life is still completely screwed.

What my character offers, and what Delia grabs onto for a while, is stability and a loving relationship. But she can never really fully commit to it and the slightest circumstance where she feels that relationship is under threat – and she sees threats from all kinds of directions – makes her feel she should throw in the towel. That's legitimate, but what a terrible shame that she couldn't ever really get past it. To an extent there is optimism in this story, in that Delia survived, but how can you trust anyone in a new relationship? It must be absolutely horrendous.

Did you enjoy working with Anna Maxwell Martin again?

It's great working with Anna, I've worked with her two or three times now and I love it. I'm always so impressed when I'm working with her, what she does on set is just beautiful, it's just a pleasure to ride along with her.

What was it like working with the director, Julia Ford?

It was really lovely, I've known Julia for about 30 years now, primarily from her days as an actor. I worked with her at the Royal Shakespeare Company many years ago and we played husband and wife in a series called Room at the Top a few years ago. I was intrigued to see how she was as a director – I'm always fascinated by people who make that jump and I know Shaun has also done it. I spoke to her about making that change and I thought she was a brilliant director, she was generous and smart, I think all the best directors know what they can bring to a set, but at the same time they fully acknowledge that there are people around them with lots of experience and they're open to listening to their opinions. Julia was just like that, she's very sensitive, supportive and smart, she's got a wonderful directing career ahead of her.

What do you think attracts audiences to true crime drama?

People are always intrigued by other people's terrible behaviour and the extents that people can go to. I know horrific things happened to Delia, and it's about trying to understand why Sweeney would act like that. To a certain extent you have to try to understand why people commit violence, you can't just lock them away and say they're monsters. Having played a few people in the past who have gone to dark places, I'm always interested to find out the motivation for their behaviour, because they aren't monsters, they're human beings. Something made them do what they did and when you play these people you have to humanise them, no matter how warped they may seem.

Do you like playing darker roles?

The villains are always the better parts to play because the task is to humanise them and make the audience understand how they got to a place where they felt that their actions were the only thing they could do. That's your duty to show that and I've always found that interesting. When I did Happy Valley it was a gift, partly because Sally's writing was so beautiful, and it was easy to show someone who was ostensibly a good person under the most horrendous pressure – panic takes over when you're faced with the most extraordinary circumstances and all sorts of things happen.

INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN DOYLE

Prior to Downton Abbey, I did a lot of darker stuff and I was often playing killers. Since then, not so much – although as soon as I finished Downton I did do Happy Valley! It's always lovely to be able to jump from comedy to darker stuff and back again, long may that continue. For me, the parts are different as you get older, but just as interesting.

Did you enjoy filming in Swansea for this drama?

I was there for about four weeks and even though the schedule was pretty full on I had a couple of days off to see the environs of Swansea and it's so beautiful! The beaches of the Gower Peninsula are extraordinary. A lovely location always helps.



INTERVIEW WITH WRITER NICK STEVENS

How did you first become aware of Delia's story?

I was loitering in the True Crime section of a book shop looking for inspiration for what to write next. I spotted Delia's book and was sufficiently intrigued by the blurb to make a purchase. Once I started reading I was hooked. The moment when Delia gives her evidence in the Old Bailey trial was the moment I knew I had to try and persuade World to get behind the project. I'd never read anything like it.

Why did you feel this was an important story to tell?

There aren't many true crime stories out there which are told from a woman's perspective. Most of the cops are male and, tragically, many of the women involved in such stories are not alive to tell their side of the story. So, Delia's gender was part of the appeal, but mostly it was her personality. The real Delia knows she can be a difficult person, partly due to her own unique wiring, partly due to the PTSD she still suffers from as a consequence of her time with John Sweeney. Once I'd got to know Delia – and spoken to some of the police officers who handled her case – I began to realise the extent to which Delia's personality had negatively impacted on her dealings with certain key individuals in the Criminal Justice System whose job it was to protect her. She was not always a compliant or cooperative victim. She was often chaotic and angry. I was fascinated by that. Ideally, a victim's personality should not affect the quality of the justice they receive, but that is exactly what happened in Delia's case.

What was your relationship like with the real Delia?

I first met Delia in the office of her literary agent. She was half an hour late to the meeting. She was very agitated and wouldn't look at me. I did my best to reassure her that my intentions were honourable and that I was basically a reasonable bloke, but I don't think these reassurances made much impression on her.

Over the course of a year, I interviewed Delia many times and, little by little, she started to trust me. She was very open but also hyper-vigilant. If I got a detail wrong or made an assumption she did not agree with, she would pounce and give me hell. Delia is a complicated person. Aren't we all?

One of the things I find most baffling about Delia is the fact that her greatest resentment and most ferocious anger is directed not at John Sweeney, but at the police and the court system. Her bitterest tirades are reserved for them. Maybe this has its roots in the catastrophic to grant Sweeney bail in the winter of 1994 – thus enabling Sweeney to carry out his savage, near-fatal attack on Delia.

Delia is extraordinary. At 74 she does ballet classes twice a week, regularly goes out for long restless walks, and travels whenever she can. Unable to afford to stay in 5-star hotels, she stays in YMCAs and Airbnbs. As she often says with tetchy pride, *I'm a traveller not a tourist*.

When I was working on the scripts I would often fret about how on earth we would keep the audience on Delia's side given her unconventional personality. However, when I watched the dailies of the first day's filming, I knew that with Anna Maxwell Martin (under Julia Ford's direction) we were in safe hands. Anna does such an extraordinary job of staying true to the spirit of Delia – in all her difficult-ness - while at the same time making her utterly compelling and, crucially, sympathetic.

INTERVIEW WITH NICK STEVENS

How did you go about writing Sweeney into the drama?

Given that the story is told mostly from Delia's perspective I knew there was a danger that Sweeney could end up a 2-D villain. We tried to track down members of his family but had no success. Delia's book - *LIVING WITH A SERIAL KILLER* – was obviously a useful source, but it was the documentary, *Kill Your Darling*, by Dutch documentary maker, Jaap van Hoewijk, which provided me with the most valuable insights on John Sweeney. There are excerpts of recorded telephone conversations between Hoewijk and Sweeney, and hearing Sweeney's voice was revelatory. It gave me a sense of his sly intelligence, his humour, and his callous contempt for Delia. There are many words and turns of phrase Sweeney uses in the documentary which I inserted in the scripts.

Sweeney was a sadistic psychopath, but it is also clear that he was deeply troubled by his own psychopathic urges and deeds. The schizophrenic split in his nature is a theme he often returns to in his disturbing artwork which is featured in the drama. He was both repelled by and obsessed with his own madness. Shaun Evans does a brilliant job of bringing this inner conflict to life, and of summoning the charm of Sweeney while simultaneously providing subtle glimpses of the danger which lies beneath.

On the subject of actor performances, I just want to say a few words about Kevin Doyle who plays David, Delia's boyfriend after Sweeney. As a writer, when you create a character you pray that whoever gets cast will deliver an authentic performance which, more or less, matches the ideal you have in your head. However, if you're lucky enough to work with really good actors – they give performances which are an improvement on what you have imagined. That was what happened, time and again, with Kevin Doyle's interpretation of what I had written. Thanks Kevin.

What keeps audiences coming back to true crime stories?

The clue's in the name. True Crime. Speaking for myself there's a special sort of frisson which comes from watching a story you know is true. Also, true stories – at least, the good ones - provide characters and narrative twists and turns which are consistently more fascinating, surprising, and shocking than the majority of fictional dramas. Obviously, the Crime part of True Crime is also a big part of the genre's appeal. True Crime stories are horror stories in which the monsters are real - and, for some of us, the lure of horror stories will never go away.



INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR JULIA FORD

What first appealed to you about directing this series?

It was the story. Nick has written a beautiful script, inspired by Delia's book and by his conversations with Delia over a period of more than two years. The story is very delicately handled and Nick has really captured the essence of her character, as well as the extraordinary things that she went through. I love the fact that the series covers such a huge arc too – it goes over 20 years, and everything changes for Delia in that time.

The fact that this is a true story also appealed to me. I've only ever worked on fictional dramas before, and so this did feel very different. It was a big responsibility, handling a real person's story, you're just very aware that these things really happened to Delia. But that was also the attraction – being able to tell her story and give her a voice.

How important was it to reflect Delia's unique personality in the series?

Nick and I agreed that it was important to stay true to who Delia is. We discussed the idea that there is a certain way that victims are 'supposed' to look and act in our society, and sometimes people aren't taken seriously if they don't behave the way you want them to. It feels incredibly unfair and unjust when you're watching the story from Delia's point of view.

I also felt one of the things that made the story interesting was the fact that Delia feels like a real person, rather than a classic TV victim. Delia is a fascinating woman, eccentric at times and quite funny, especially as played by the brilliant Anna Maxwell Martin. She's very engaging and you want to watch her, she's full of all sorts of surprises and she's much more interesting than if we'd taken away the slightly more unconventional side of her, or the times when she might be a little bit abrasive. If we'd knocked those parts off her character I think it would have made her quite bland, but one of the things I first loved about the script was asking questions about this brilliant free spirit who lives in a place with no furniture and rubs people up the wrong way. At the end of the day, all human beings are full of quirks and it was important she remained interesting, complex and contradictory. I'm absolutely over the moon that Anna said yes to playing Delia, she gives the most wonderful performance.

How did you help Shaun Evans to portray Sweeney?

The role is a tough ask and we were really lucky that Shaun said yes, because he is an incredibly thoughtful, clever actor who really looks into character and leaves no stone unturned, he's very detailed in his work. He had a very strong instinct about what he didn't want John to be, and how he wanted to portray him and I have to say his insights into this character were a revelation. It would be easy to slip into a two-dimensional version of this story, a black and white predator and victim scenario, but that was never going to happen with Shaun playing John. He plays the role with such complexity, he's very natural and real. So both he and Anna were a gift to me as a director really, and they worked brilliantly with each other.

Was it important to show how women can find themselves in such awful situations?

Yes, unfortunately it's still very easy for people to look at domestic violence and say "Why did you stay?" but it's so much more complicated than that. It's part of our story – you start off thinking the relationship is one thing and then it becomes something else, almost without you knowing it's happening. Unfortunately, there are many versions of this story out there, it is a horrible thing that many people live with.

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR JULIA FORD

This series does feel very timely. I was looking at reports on how many rapes and domestic violence incidents are reported and the conviction rates are so small, it's just horrendous. I don't know what needs to happen for it to change, you do wonder sometimes if we're going backwards.

How did you approach the difficult scenes depicting the abuse inflicted on Delia?

It was always really important to me that everybody felt totally fine with the way we approached these scenes, because they were a big ask. It was a team effort and we just all talked to each other and worked together to work out how we would film these moments. We had access to an intimacy co-ordinator, which is a great new development, because in the old days you just turned up on set and nobody dared ask how we would do such a scene. But I had been talking to Anna about it from our very first phone call, before she took the role.

I'm not interested in doing anything that would make the actress or the actor feel uncomfortable because there is always another way of doing the scene, so we kept talking throughout and stayed open. But also, Anna and I both felt it was really important to be as accurate as possible in our depiction of what Delia was going through, and not to shy away from that. So there were lots of delicate discussions. I do feel like we did the right thing. It's upsetting to watch and we don't shy away from what happened, but nothing is gratuitous at any point. Even though it's harrowing stuff, and it was a challenge at times, it was a joy to work with such a brilliant team.

Did you have to make key decisions about how much of the violence you actually show to the audience?

When I came on board that was part of a conversation we had in my interview, and I said from the outset that I didn't want it to be gratuitous or sensationalised. You've got to have some violence to tell the story, so we filmed lots of it to give ourselves options, and then edited it down. I think we've got the right balance of what you see and what you don't see. TV is so violent these days, and by those standards this drama is really tame, but this is a true story so we wanted to be a bit more delicate with it and just do enough. People needed to know it was horrific rather than horror.

Does your experience as an actor help you as a director?

Hopefully it helps in that I do have an understanding of how you can feel sometimes on a set. I'm sensitive to that and try to create a nice atmosphere, because I just think everyone does their best work when it's more relaxed. I also understand that all actors work very differently from each other, there isn't a set way to get the best work, and I'm collaborative, so I'll listen to people. There are so many ways to become a director, and the people who come through cameras have that wonderful gift of seeing things very visually, but yes it certainly helps to have the experience of being an actor.

As well as Delia herself, did you talk to other people involved in her story?

Our writer, Nick consulted with lots of people, he conducted such detailed research and had a lot of interesting material to draw from. He interviewed two of the police officers who eventually brought Sweeney to justice and our actors got the chance to meet them too, and I met them when they visited set. The Family Liaison Officer on Delia's case came to watch the Old Bailey scenes, and it was amazing to meet her. She was watching Shaun as John Sweeney, and she just couldn't believe it, she kept saying he was exactly like him.

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR JULIA FORD

How did you want the series to look on screen?

It always had to be rooted in reality, because it's a real story, but we also wanted it to look cinematic. The lighting is beautiful and we have great sets and locations, so I think we got that balance right. It's set in 1991, so that gives it a particular look, but also Delia and John are more rooted in the 1970s because of the music they're into and their clothes.

We filmed in Swansea, which was fantastic and the Welsh crew were wonderful. At first I wondered how it could double up for Camden, but sure enough there are these great streets with terraced houses that look like where Delia really lived, it's like little pockets of London. There's a place called Brangwyn Hall, which we used for the scenes at the Old Bailey, and it's absolutely stunning. So you wouldn't know we weren't in London.

What do you hope the audience will take from this drama?

Hopefully they will feel really involved with Delia and her story – I hope they will be outraged at some points and fascinated by her at others. I want them to see her incredible resilience and reflect on how amazing it is that someone can survive what she went through, it's inspiring. I'm glad that her story is being told.

INTERVIEW WITH EXECUTIVE PRODUCER SIMON HEATH

Why did you decide to turn Delia Balmer's story into a drama?

Nick Stevens is a writer I've collaborated with before on *In Plain Sight* and *The Pembrokeshire Murders* – both true stories. Nick is an excellent writer who approaches true stories in the right way – building relationships with the real people affected, conducting his own detailed research and writing the stories in a considered and sensitive way. So when he approached me with Delia Balmer's story during the first lockdown of 2020, I was immediately keen. After reading her book, Nick had begun discussing with Delia how he might bring her story to the screen.

True crime tends to focus on the killer or the cops who catch the killer, and it's rare we hear the story of the victim. In this story, Delia survived multiple attacks at the hands of a man who had already killed, then was crucial in bringing him to justice for all his crimes. But another part of Delia's story centres on how we expect our victims to conform to a specific type – submissive, grateful and 'likeable' – but why should that be the case? Victims of violence are so often traumatised. Delia's story illustrates how the judicial system lets victims down, both in the failure to take her initial complaints seriously, and her treatment during Sweeney's first trial. Ultimately this felt like a unique, gripping story with important themes running through it.

I'm really pleased with the end result – it's a powerful, unique story about a woman who would be the traditional victim in a serial killer drama, who survives and fights back in a powerful and moving way.

Did you know anything about Delia's case before speaking to Nick?

I don't know anyone involved in the production that was familiar with the case. Sometimes you're telling true stories where there is familiarity, as when we made *In Plain Sight* – pretty much everyone in Scotland was familiar with the serial killer Peter Manuel. If it's a well-known case, you need to ask whether you are shining a new light on the story, or finding a new angle. If it's an unknown story like this one, you consider if it speaks to more universal themes - which Delia's story absolutely does.

Ultimately this is a story that Delia wanted told and the fact that Nick had built a relationship with her for more than a year before he approached me reassured me that this was the right thing to do. Nick shared drafts of the scripts with Delia, took on board her feedback, spoke to her regularly and brought her to set twice.

Do you think this feels like a particularly timely drama, given the failings of the police in Delia's case and last year's report about the Met?

It is timely - which is depressing because this is a case that dates back 25 years and you would hope that things would have improved by now. At World Productions we were often criticised by the head of the Met, Cressida Dick when making *Line of Duty*, for depicting police wrongdoing – but this report, amongst others, makes these failings explicit. To be working on this drama and then be reminded that nothing has really changed was depressing.

The issues the drama illuminates haven't gone away. There's still a serious failure to take domestic violence seriously enough. This drama is a reminder of that. It was important for the drama to show how Delia got herself into the relationship with Sweeney, how he trapped her and then how difficult it was for her to get away. Even when Delia did escape, the courts failed to deal with Sweeney and he was almost able to take fatal revenge on her. All those steps are really well articulated through Nick's script and that's something that we don't always see dramatised on screen. If you don't do this right, then people will just ask why Delia didn't walk out, and it isn't that simple.

INTERVIEW WITH EXECUTIVE PRODUCER SIMON HEATH

Casting is so important for a drama like this – did you always have Anna Maxwell Martin and Shaun Evans in mind to play Delia and Sweeney?

We did. It really helped that we had worked with both Anna and Shaun before, so we had a shared trust and rapport. We'd worked with Anna on Line of Duty and The Bletchley Circle, so I knew what a fantastic actress she is. You're never sure how an actor will respond if you send them this kind of challenging material, so we waited until we had all four scripts before we shared them with Anna. It felt to us that Anna had the ability to depict all of the facets of Delia's character – the anger, the humour, the fight in her, and also the terror that she felt at the hands of Sweeney.

I knew playing Sweeney would be a challenge for any actor. We'd worked with Shaun on Vigil and knew he was a serious, thoughtful actor. We talked at length about how he would play Sweeney and how crucial it was that the audience understood what Delia saw in Sweeney. The audience has to believe the start of the relationship before it turns dark, the way domestic abuse often does. Shaun had to travel through all of that. He's a great actor and we felt fortunate he came on board. Under Julia Ford's brilliant direction, both Shaun and Anna have delivered pitch perfect performances.

How challenging was it to bring some of the darkest moments in Delia's story to screen?

Very. We need to see the worst of Sweeney's crimes, without wallowing in them. Equally, we couldn't avoid the violence entirely, for risk of ameliorating Sweeney's crimes. It was absolutely critical to me that we had a female director on this show, and Julia's relationship with Anna is pivotal to the whole project. Julia shot a huge amount of material so that we have choices about how much we choose to show and how much we depict through the incredible testimony Delia gives at the police station and at Sweeney's trial.

Did you feel a duty of care towards the cast and crew?

Absolutely and you find that with material of this kind different casts and crew respond in different ways. Anna is the very opposite of a method actor, she's someone who is totally in character, then you call cut and she can switch immediately to talk about the TV show she watched the night before, to take the pressure out of the environment. But the week Anna and Shaun were filming his attack on Delia in her flat was tough for all involved.

Rehearsals didn't necessarily take the form of the actors saying their lines, but more talking through the material and how it's going to be approached. Julia was an actress herself, so really understood how to help those actors through those scenes. Ultimately it's a collaboration between the actors, director and other professionals to make the set a safe and happy environment.

Where did you film the series, and how did you recreate 1990s London?

The whole series is shot around Swansea. Partly this was a cost decision, but partly it's based on the fact that North London (where Delia's story took place) no longer resembles the North London of the 1990s, which I knew very well. The locations were extremely convincing, to the point here I couldn't believe the location pictures weren't actually taken in North London. It's amazing how the architecture matches up and has the right period feel.

We looked at a number of options for Delia's flat, which is where the horrific attacks took place. In order to provide a safe and happy environment for the cast and crew, we took the decision to build the flat as a set. We had a brilliant production designer who recreated the look of Delia's real flat, but gave us more time and control than we'd have on location



INTERVIEW WITH EXECUTIVE PRODUCER LUCY ROCH

Why is Delia's story important to tell?

I think it's a story that we need to keep telling again and again, because violence against women is still so prevalent. Everyone seems to forget about it, but I think if the same thing was happening to another section of society it would be a much bigger deal.

I think it's about changing people's attitudes to the women who find themselves in these situations, because there's still a strong tendency to say, "Oh well, she should just leave". And what we really wanted to show with this story is that it really isn't that easy. You can't just leave. Delia tries to tell Sweeney to move out and he won't go. Once someone has got their hooks into you and you've begun a relationship with a man like that, it is very difficult to extricate yourself. So I think we wanted to use this series as an opportunity to show people what it's like to find yourself in that situation, and hopefully get a bit more sympathy and understanding for women like Delia. By the end of the series, I hope the audience will be saying, "Wow, look how amazing that woman is, I never thought about how difficult it is to get away from a man like Sweeney."

Delia's story stands out as a story of domestic abuse and violence, because she is still alive. She survived, and her tenacity and refusal to give up really shines through. So while some elements are quite dark, there is light to be found in the story as well. And I think there is a hopeful message in there too.

How did you go about depicting the violence in this story in a sensitive way?

We wanted to make it as realistic as possible, but hopefully not too difficult to watch, and it's a very difficult balance to strike. Our director, Julia, did an amazing job of rendering the violence and horror without showing too much graphic detail on the screen. With the main attack where Delia nearly dies, you do see Sweeney attacking her but you can't see the damage he's inflicting. There's nothing really gory – it's about getting a strong sense of the horror without having to hone in on the gritty details.

What was it like working with the real Delia Balmer to bring her story to screen?

Nick worked very closely with her, and I met her twice, once in London and another time when she came to visit the set in Swansea. Delia adheres quite strictly to the truth, and inevitably when you're making a drama out of a real-life story, you have to change things slightly. That doesn't mean to say that you change any fundamental facts, but perhaps the timeline isn't quite exactly as it was in real life, or some details are omitted. We wanted to make sure Delia was happy and we changed anything that she felt uncomfortable with, but equally there were times when we had to explain why things needed to be changed for the drama, so it was a balance. Delia read all of the scripts, gave her feedback and we made changes based on that feedback.

Delia is portrayed in the drama as a rather unconventional personality, was it important not to water down her character?

Yes, I think it's quite a big part of the story, the fact that Delia doesn't react as one might expect a female victim of domestic abuse and violence to react. That impacts on the treatment that she gets from the legal system, which is key. It's also important to say this is not a really dour, grim drama. Delia is a fun character, she is interesting, she's colourful and she has a sense of humour, so I hope that people will want to spend time with her on screen.

INTERVIEW WITH EXECUTIVE PRODUCER LUCY ROCH

We couldn't have wished for better casting with Anna Maxwell Martin. We had long conversations about which actress could be the right fit, but Anna is perfect – she's got Delia's mannerisms and accent down really well, and her forthright manner. Watching her work every day was magical.

Was it tricky to bring Sweeney to life on screen?

Our writer, Nick did a really excellent job with Sweeney and not making him a caricature villain. I think one of the messages in this story is that you cannot judge a relationship from the outside and you can't look at someone and say, "Oh no, he would never hit his wife", because you just don't know. That's not to foster suspicion of all men, it's more about remembering that these things are much more prevalent than we'd like to think, and that can be uncomfortable. We shouldn't let our discomfort get in the way of seeing the truth – something I am of course also guilty of at times!

It sounds counter-intuitive, but Shaun was really brilliant at making Sweeney very human, and very real. That's the scary thing – people who commit these horrible crimes don't have "Murderer" written on their forehead. They seem normal, and you could live next door to them and think they're alright.

This series is quite critical of the police and justice system, isn't it?

That's fair. It's important to remember that the story starts in the early 1990s, and while we've come a long way with attitudes towards this sort of crime, equally, I would argue that attitudes still haven't changed enough. That's partly why we're telling the story.

The legal system is a very harsh system, and it's designed to be fair, but arguably sometimes it feels unfairly weighted against the victim and it needs to be modernised. I don't know what the solution to that might be, it's a thorny problem, but more needs to be done to make it easier for victims like Delia to give evidence in court, and to make it a less harrowing experience.

The beautiful thing about this series is that each episode is its own story in a way. So Episode One is the story of how Delia got involved with Sweeney. Episode Two is the story of when things get really dark with him. Episode Three is the aftermath and the recovery and then Episode Four is the journey through the legal system, and it explores how traumatising that process can be for a victim. People look from the outside and think surely you'd want to do everything you could to put Sweeney away and get him off the streets, but actually they don't appreciate how traumatic it can be to relive that experience in front of a crowded room of people, and indeed the person who inflicted those experiences on you.

You've worked on other true crime dramas, how did this one compare?

This series was a unique challenge, because normally when you're doing a true crime drama the main part is the procedural element that takes you through the investigation, and that's your focal point. We're all quite familiar with that format, so in a way a drama like The Pembrokeshire Murders was probably slightly easier to bring to life.

Until I Kill You is very much a character-based drama, and we always had to keep reminding ourselves to tell the story from her point of view. That unconscious bias not to focus on the woman in that situation is ingrained in all of us, and Julia made brilliant shot choices to present everything from Delia's perspective, even down to the scenes of violence. When you're inside her experience, the drama becomes something different and something not seen as often on television.

INTERVIEW WITH EXECUTIVE PRODUCER LUCY ROCH

Why do true crime stories continue to grip audiences?

I think it's because the truth is often stranger than fiction, and the knowledge that something really happened means you have to work less hard to get the audience to believe it. There are some things that happen in real life, where if you put them in a fictional drama with fictional characters it would just be completely unbelievable. For example, the fact that Sweeney had already attacked Delia twice, but was granted bail and came back and nearly killed her – if that happened in a fictional drama, you'd think we were being melodramatic.



INTERVIEW WITH DELIA BALMER

How did you feel about your story being made into a TV drama?

I wrote my own original story because I wanted the facts of what really happened known. Often the media had not portrayed them accurately, and many issues important to me had not been stated. The printed book had been edited and much of what I had written was also omitted.

I met Nick Stevens, the writer of the drama, in my literary agent's office. He has included some of the events, which I had written about that did not appear in the book. I gave him detailed critiques of the drafts he had written. He followed my wishes and made certain changes where possible, and as I had suggested. Nick is very nice, and in his own words says he is trying to help me. The team at ITV have also treated me favourably. I had the opportunity of visiting the set in Wales. It was interesting to watch filming of some of the drama.

Were you hesitant to allow this painful time in your life to be dramatized?

When I wrote my original story, I included every detail of what happened. When it came to the final attack on the doorstep, I edited it over and over again, wanting everything to read precisely as it had happened. My concern has always been to get the truth out by whatever means. I remain an angry person. Sweeney was let out on bail. The police gave me insufficient protection before his final assault. Later, I was forced to go to court to be further traumatised by the system.

What does your life look like now?

I am a perfectionist but my life is opposite of perfect. I often suffer from depression and anxiety, afraid of life and afraid of the future, a compulsive worrier. When I look in the mirror I see a stranger. Certain physical pain, I will have for life. I am stuck. I cannot move on, and cannot go further. Fear holds me back from doing certain things.

I live for travel, but it has also become almost my only escape from reality. Ballet classes have always been an important part of my life.

Have you received any support in the aftermath of your experience?

I received 20 sessions from a clinical psychologist at a PTSD clinic. I refused to accept what was allowed to happen to me, and which was never acknowledged. My extreme anger remains. A counsellor, also chaplain of the Middlesex Hospital at that time, and another man from MIND were the most helpful. Several other counsellors, all female, were of little benefit.



EPISODE SYNOPSIS

EPISODE 01

London, 1991: Out for a drink in a local pub with her nursing colleagues, Delia Balmer meets carpenter John Sweeney, recently returned from Amsterdam. Beguiled by his rebellious attitude and approach to life, a relationship starts and Delia soon invites him to move into her flat. In Amsterdam, we meet American Jack Halstead appealing to the Dutch police for help in finding his missing daughter, Melissa.

On a Christmas trip to meet Sweeney's family in Skelmersdale, Delia discovers that he has an ex-wife and children he no longer sees. What else is he hiding from her? As the relationship worsens and Delia grows more afraid of Sweeney's temper, Leah counsels her to throw him out. But Delia's attempt to break up with Sweeney prompts him to reveal his darkest secret and his true violent nature.

EPISODE 02

Delia uses all her guile to escape Sweeney's violence. With Leah's help, she must decide what to do next – will going to the police put her in more danger from Sweeney? Delia reluctantly talks to the local police Domestic Violence unit, but when they accompany her back to her flat Sweeney has fled.

Frustrated with the police's attitude to Sweeney's disturbing drawings of his ex-girlfriend, Melissa, Delia refuses to leave her flat and go to temporary accommodation. After Sweeney attacks Delia a second time, the police arrest and charge him but, astonishingly he is granted bail. Once again, Delia finds herself at risk.

EPISODE 03

Having barely escaped with her life, Delia lies in a critical condition in hospital as police search for Sweeney. Whilst Delia endures a long recovery, Sweeney continues to evade capture. With her family in North America and no friends allowed to visit for security, Delia initially relies on her Family Liaison Officer, Jane Barker, but so intense is Delia's PTSD and the anger she feels towards the police, that their relationship cannot continue.

Plagued by PTSD and nightmares, Delia nevertheless picks up the pieces of her life and moves to a new council flat. She meets David, a sweet man who sees past her prickly exterior. At long last Delia finds a modicum of happiness, but when news arrives that Sweeney has finally been arrested and she must give evidence against him in court, her hard-won peace is shattered all over again.

EPISODE 04

Delia testifies against Sweeney in court, but the guilty verdict brings no peace for her. The trauma of the experience and Sweeney's paltry sentence for offences against Delia leave her angrier than ever. She finds an outlet in writing angry letters to the police and the Home Office complaining about her treatment and feeling failed by the Criminal Justice System. David finds Delia's obsessive anger very hard to deal with and their relationship breaks down. Almost a decade later, police in Amsterdam make a remarkable discovery – they finally identify Melissa Halstead's body.

CHARACTER & CAST CREDITS

Anna Maxwell Martin

Shaun Evans

Kevin Doyle

Amanda Wilkin

Lucy Thackeray

Laura Morgan

Stephanie Street

Geoffrey Streatfeild

Steve Edge

Matthew Aubrey

Delia Balmer

John Sweeney

David

Leah

WPC Jane Barker

DC Christine Webb

Janice Rainsworth

DI Steve Smith

DS Collins

DC Flynn

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Writer	NICK STEVENS
Producer	KEN HORN
Director	JULIA FORD
Executive Producer	SIMON HEATH
Executive Producer	LUCY ROCH
Line Producer	UNA SAPLAMIDE
Production Designer	TOM PEARCE
1st AD	GEOFF SKELDING
DOP	SAM THOMAS
Casting Director	SAM JONES
Costume Designer	DAWN THOMAS-MONDO
Editor	JONATHAN LUCAS
Editor	PATCH HALL
Gaffer	STEVE GUY
Locations Manager	CHRIS GREEN
Locations Manager	RYAN GREEN
Hair and Make Up Designer	TORI ROBINSON
Script Supervisor	MIA SANDS
Sound recordist	TAM SHORING

UNTIL I KILL YOU: THE REAL STORY (1 x 60 min)



This companion documentary airing on ITV1 and IT VX tells the story of Delia Balmer, a woman who bravely faced and survived the brutality of serial killer John Sweeney.

The film explores the haunting stories of Sweeney's known victims, including Melissa Halstead, an American model, and Paula Fields, a mother of three. It reveals the grisly details of how he dismembered their bodies and disposed of their remains — Melissa's in a Rotterdam canal and Paula's in London's Regent's Canal.

Narrated by Anna Maxwell Martin, who plays Delia in the gripping four-part ITV drama series *Until I Kill You*, this documentary offers a raw glimpse into the real-life events that inspired the series, bringing a powerful and emotive view to the story.

MultiStory Media

Series Producer - Iwan Roberts

Executive Producer – Mike Blair

Producer/ Director - Nicky Hendy

Deputy Head of Production - Helen Houston

Production Managers - Viki Townend & Joanna Lewis