

How did you feel when you heard the viewing figures for Bridgerton on Netflix were 63 million over Christmas?

It's so incredible. I've always loved period drama and this is clever as it's got its own modern sensibility, part of which is the diversity of casting – it's inclusive. Hopefully a person of colour can watch it and not feel excluded like they have been in most period drama that's been made.

You directed episodes four and five. What were the challenges?

The biggest challenge is always the number of hours in the day. We had a lot of scenes with an enormous number of people in them. These are more difficult to capture and they take longer to



Ladies' fave: Regé-Jean Page

TIPS FROM THE TOP

With TV and film director **Sheree Folkson**

THE BRIDGERTON AND SEX/LIFE DIRECTOR ON ADDING RACIAL DIVERSITY TO PERIOD DRAMAS, AND WHY REGÉ-JEAN PAGE SHOULD BE THE NEXT BOND

shoot. The way to help this is to shoot with three cameras. We did that for the boxing match, the balls and the wedding party.

Are sex scenes easier to film with the advent of 'intimacy coordinators'?

It's fantastic having an intimacy coordinator. I can't believe we never

used to have them. Sex scenes are now treated like when you do a stunt. You have a stunt coordinator who works out all the moves with the actors because they are not going to really fight. Likewise, the actors are not really going to have sex. For Bridgerton, I had Daphne's big 'losing her virginity' scene. You work everything out in advance. You have time to go through it with the actors and the intimacy adviser, Lizzie Talbot. Then she also talks to the actors alone to make sure they are happy with everything and how to do it.

How did the dogs behave in the court scene in episode five?

The dogs were wonderful. I decided I was going to put the Queen in the middle and have the women with the dogs sitting on their laps seated to both sides. I was going to do a shot where we tracked past all the dogs' faces and then on to The Queen. On that day we had so much pressure because we were actually filming in a building near St James's Palace and they were going to throw us out at an agreed time but the dogs were perfect.

Regé-Jean Page is being talked up as the next James Bond...

He's perfect. Regé sort of draws you in. Sir Sean Connery had that. And women love Regé, which is also quite important. All my girlfriends were watching Bridgerton and texting me, going, 'Simon! Simon!' It was hilarious.

What was your first work as a drama director?

I went to the BBC on this wonderful scheme they used to have as a graduate trainee. You couldn't do drama so I was directing arts programmes but I pushed to do drama. Someone said they were about to do multi-camera dramas so I went on a course to learn it. It's quite a different skill, in some ways, but you're directing actors and drama. Via the arts show I was doing I got a drama called The Trials Of Oz with Leslie Phillips, Sir Nigel Hawthorne and Hugh Grant, pre-Four Weddings. We got a Bafta nomination and I found an agent and went on to direct series three of Band Of Gold, the Kay Mellor drama.

Mistakes, you've made a few?

My first job directing in the US was the second episode of Ugly Betty. I'd previously turned down an offer to

direct an episode of Grey's Anatomy. They loved what I did with my Ugly Betty episode and begged me to do more but I didn't want to because I wanted to create my own work. I was so naive.

What advice were you given by others when you began?

An American agent once said to me when I was about to start a job: 'Make everyone love you.' It's not always possible but it's worth aiming for.

What advice would you give to someone starting out now who wants to direct?

Watch lots of movies. Watch lots of TV. Make your own stuff. Shoot something on your phone. Don't be frightened of being pushy. Tell the story.

You were one of the first female directors on modern-era Doctor Who. Do you see more opportunities now?

It's not just on Doctor Who. A few years ago, the industry started to notice that the proportion of female directors on TV drama was tiny. In certain areas such as sci-fi it was even smaller. There used to be an idea that the director was like a general leading his troops – it's a sort of masculine ideal. Almost all of my early work was given to me by female producers. Historically, male producers used to give the job of directing to a man. Gender is totally irrelevant to being a good director.

How has Covid impacted on your work?

It postponed the Netflix show, Sex/Life, which had done about nine days' filming last March in Toronto and then got closed down but came

back in September. On a day-to-day level, it was fine. People on set were all wearing PPE and we were tested three times a week.

What can you say about Sex/Life?

It's a steamy look at female identity and desire. As you can imagine, the intimacy coordinator was very much on hand.

INTERVIEW BY PAUL SIMPER

Bridgerton is on Netflix



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