

## **Course outline: Diploma in Writing and Producing Comedy**

The course consists of a logical progression of classes, practical workshops and modules, taught and overseen by industry professionals run over 3 terms starting in January each year. Teaching sessions usually takes place on Tuesday evenings 18.30 - 20.30.

Knowledge is imparted and experience gained through workshops and writing. You will compile a personal folder (part of your Graduation Portfolio) of written work submitted during the course and your final assessment will be based on this as well as your performance in your Progress Reviews. Please see the sections on Assessment Criteria and Assessment and Final Classification below for more information on how you will be assessed throughout the course.

### **Induction and Introduction to Writing and Producing Comedy (Term 1)**

The Comedy Writing and Producing course is broadly divided into the modules listed below. Some work on narrative comedy will begin at the start of the course and continue at throughout when time allows, because the need to start thinking about narrative ideas should not be left to the autumn. The sooner ideas, characters, precincts, angles and tone are seeded the better.

#### **Module 1 - Sketch Shows**

Sketches and one-liners are the 'way in' for most comedy writers. If you can write a funny sketch, then chances are you can write a funny scene in a narrative show, but it takes practice. Students will be writing sketches to a deadline and getting and receiving feedback and then rewriting. What makes a good sketch show? How long should a sketch be? Quickies, runners, call-backs, tips for sketch writing, sketch show schedules, audience sketch shows, impression shows, topical shows, sketches for YouTube, writers' meetings, editing sketches, casting sketch shows, the role of the writer/performer, radio sketches.

#### **Module 2 - Comedy Entertainment (unscripted comedy)**

Most production companies and commissioners, including the BBC, make a clear distinction between scripted comedy (sketch and sitcom) and 'unscripted comedy', or 'comedy entertainment': panel, stand-up and chat. They are often made in different departments and have different commissioners. Most comedy writers depend for their living on the paradoxical task of providing scripts for unscripted shows.

Chat shows, panel, one-liners, topical shows, stand-up shows, live shows, archive shows all need ideas, questions, funny answers, 'shtick' and, above all, jokes, jokes and more jokes. Creating your own successful format can be the best way of securing both a job and a living.

We will cover creating formats, writing presenter scripts, writing, assessing and editing one-liners. Students will write jokes in the style of *Have I Got News For You*, which will be assessed by a HIGNFY writer.

### **Module 3 - Radio Comedy and podcasts**

BBC radio commissions more hours of comedy than any other organisation in the world. It's potentially the biggest market for a comedy writer or producer and has bigger audiences than all but a few TV networks. (Many TV writers would like to write for radio but can't afford to.) Increasingly, shows, producers and writers move back and forth between radio and TV. We'll be covering the specific requirements of radio comedy, the commissioning process, slots, script layout, and writing for sound only. Students will be writing a 15-minute pilot script for the 23.00 slot on Radio 4. Students will visit a radio studio and learn about some technicalities of radio production. Podcast is an extremely fast growing medium – or it could be a bubble about to burst.

### **Module 4 - Writing an existing sitcom**

For many writers, the majority of their careers can be spent writing for shows they did not create. Writing scenes and pitching ideas for an existing sitcom will take away some of the uncertainties that beset the writer struggling with a new show of their own. The characterisation and tone will have already been set. Students will pitch plot ideas for an existing sitcom, and write sample stories.

### **Module 5 Narrative comedy**

'Narrative comedy' describes any comedy which has a story, whether that be a single camera non-audience show, or a multi-camera audience sitcom. The phrase 'narrative comedy' and 'sitcom' are often used interchangeably. Neither term should be confused with comedy-drama, which this course does not cover.

Students will write a narrative comedy script for TV. At various points in the process students will get feedback on the concept, the characters and story ideas. How they proceed from there will be up to them, as there is no 'right way' to write a script, but feedback will be available at all stages within reasonable limits.