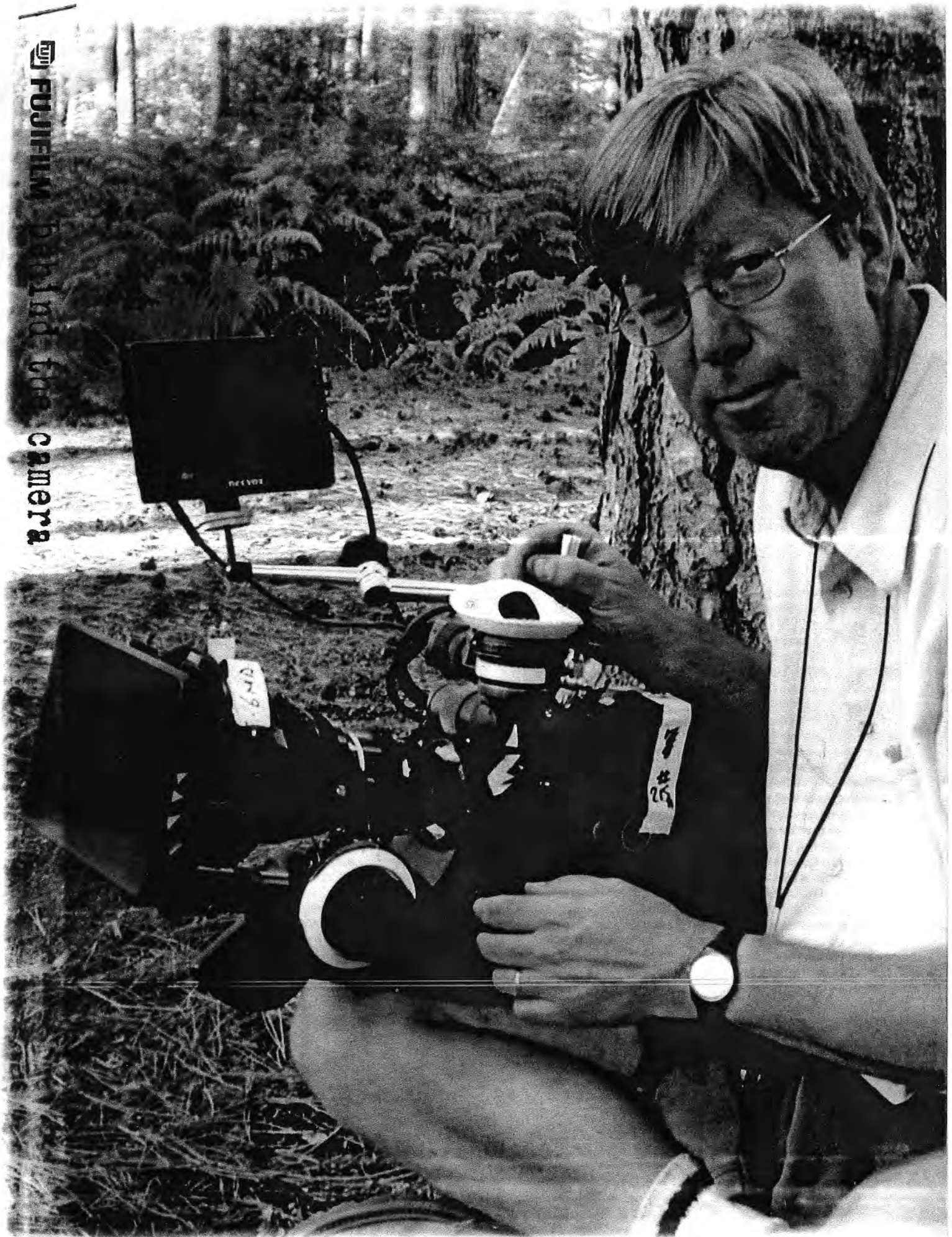


FUJIFILM Behind the camera



GEARED UP FOR HORROR SPOOF

AN INTERVIEW WITH
MARTIN HAWKINS

Martin Hawkins' *curriculum vitae* reads like a compendium of the Best Of popular television - from hit sitcoms and sketch shows like *The Vicar Of Dibley*, *Birds Of A Feather* and *Alistair McGowan* to dramas such as *Talking Heads*, *Holby City* and *Casualty*.

So it comes as perhaps something of a surprise to discover that fortysomething Hawkins, who insists he first dreamed of becoming a cameraman at the age of nine, has only just shot his first ever bit of primetime film.

And even that might never have happened had a 'blind test' to determine the 'look' of Channel Four's upcoming six-part comedy series, *Garth Marenghi* - produced by Charlie Hanson and line-produced by Stephen Abrahams - turned out differently.

For those who don't know about the Perrier award-winning creation of writer-director-performers Matt Holness and Richard Ayoade, *Garth Marenghi*, as recreated for C4 from their original stage show, is basically a spoof cult TV horror show within a spoof TV documentary.

Hawkins explained his 'celluloid break': "The programme was originally going to be on tape even though Matt and Richard always said it ought to be on film. Their whole concept was of a programme, called *Darkplace*, which was originally done in the 80s but whose tapes had been lost until now.

"And they both felt that if it had an inkling of film with a video effect, you wouldn't believe it. You had to believe it was done on film in the 80s. However, the show was never budgeted for film, always for tape.

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Photos main: Cinematographer Martin Hawkins; Above l-r: Star line-up from *Drop The Dead Donkey*; Julie Walters in *Talking Heads* (photo courtesy BBC); Martin Hawkins with sound recordist Dave Chapman and Anneka Rice on *Challenge Anneka*

MARTIN HAWKINS

"I LOVED THE GROUND GLASS IN THE CAMERA WHICH GAVE YOU A SENSE OF THE EMOTION IN A SCENE AS WELL AS AN IDEA OF THE DEPTH AND CONTRAST."

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"So there was this hiatus. Eventually, after discussion between the production company Avalon and C4, they arranged for a test day. A video camera, with two different settings on the set-up card, and a film camera were set up side by side and we shot two scenes using two different stocks, including Fuji.

"In the end we had these four versions of the work which were then edited and put to a committee. Everybody, including me, picked out the Fuji version as the one they liked best. As a 'blind' test, it was a honest result. The result was C4 came back with a little bit more money and we stayed on film apart from the present day bits on digibeta in which the

"So I suggested to Richard that I get in a geared head. I couldn't operate one, never had, but it would give a 'look' that would make it a bit more naff than it needed to be. I told him it might not work, in fact it might completely backfire on us, in which case we'd go back to plan A.

"Richard said, 'Great! Try it!' And it was the best thing we ever did. It gave it all just a bit of a mechanical look. Up across, up across. The 'look' helped date it enormously. The downside of it was that I operated it so much that by the time the seven week schedule was up, I had actually become quite a good geared head operator. By the end, I was actually trying to operate badly!" he laughed.

"With video, you're looking at a pretty bland black-and-white picture. It kind of gives you a contrast but doesn't really give any emotion to the scene. I loved the ground glass in the camera which gave you a sense of the emotion in a scene as well as an idea of the depth and contrast. I really enjoyed that bit of the process."

Hawkins was reflecting on his film stint during the summer as, with now autumn well underway, he was, alongside his *Garth Marengi* gaffer, Colin McCarthy, watching the set go up on Stage 5 at HDS Studios in Hayes (just across the way from Yeading FC where actress Parminder Nagra bent it like Beckham) for his latest piece of TV, *Bedtime*.



cast talk about their experience of making *Darkplace*."

Filming a 'lost' cult TV series that was distinguished only by its sheer awfulness and ineptitude was not without its own unique challenges.

"It's actually very hard," said Hawkins. "It's a fine line and you have to be very careful treading it. Richard, who effectively did most of the directing, felt that the cameraman doing the programme shouldn't be a real cameraman; he was probably a friend of someone who'd come along to do the camera. In the past, when you've tried to achieve the look of dodgy camerawork, you always tend to end up shaking the head. It's never quite satisfactory.

"To get that 80's feel we also went for very hard lighting, lots of shadows, lots of top lighting. Not my style exactly, but relevant to what we were doing. For reference we watched old *Star Treks*, *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, *Quantum Leap* and *The Professionals*. That was the style. Matt and Richard really did their homework and would come in with DV tapes of rehearsal which acted as a kind of video storyboard. It certainly helped speed things up."

Hawkins admitted that his belated entry into the film stakes was quite affecting: "What it taught me as a DP coming from video was that I didn't have to rely on the monitor as much as I thought I would. What your eye tells you is an awful lot.

The three-part half-hour comedy-drama for the BBC, with Sheila Hancock and Timothy West, would reunite him with writer-director Andy Hamilton for whom Hawkins last worked as a camera operator years ago on the newsroom comedy hit, *Drop The Dead Donkey*.

In the canteen at HDS, Hawkins talked about his start in television which came when as a 16-year-old school leaver, the North Londoner got a job in the post room at London Weekend Television. Just before his 18th birthday, a cameraman left and Hawkins graduated from the post room to the camera department as a trainee.

Starting as the lowliest on a six-man camera crew, he began as a 'cable

basher' moving very gradually up the ladder where, perched at the top, was the senior cameraman followed by his number two. "One of the great things about those days at LWT," Hawkins recalled, "was the variety. There might be comedy on a Monday or Tuesday, say *Bless Me Father* with Arthur Lowe,

Photos main l-r: Matt Berry, Richard Ayoade (Actor/Director), Matt Holness and Alice Lowe star in *Garth Marengi*. Above l-r: Martin Hawkins with crew; on the set with Richard Ayoade and focus puller Martin Blinko; with gaffer Colin McCarthy



then perhaps a drama like *Within These Walls*, a football match on the Saturday and even a church service on the Sunday. As far as I was concerned I was there for life."

Except he wasn't. After seven years he, fellow crewman Tony Keene and his senior cameraman Mike

Lingard moved on to the newly-opened Limehouse Studios on the Isle of Dogs. By the time the facility was knocked down in 1989 to make way for the Canary Wharf Tower, Hawkins was head of cameras at the independent production facility having worked first as an operator on shows and dramas

like *Who Dares Wins*, *Network 7*, *Hiawatha* and *Kipling*.


Next stop was Mentorn Films where, along with sound recordist Dave Chapman, he became almost a household name in his guise as the tireless Anneka Rice's camera-wielding sidekick on the popular BBC

series, *Challenge Anneka*, arguably the forerunner of today's 'makeover' TV shows. Featuring comely Anneka Rice and, more famously, aft, Hawkins accompanied the professional doggoer on five series, four of them after he'd actually left Mentorn to go fully freelance in order to get more variety of assignments.

His work on *Challenge Anneka* – which took him, most memorably from his point view, to Rumania where they renovated an orphanage – earned him a BAFTA nomination for best cameraman'. Hawkins, a winner of an 'outstanding achievement' award from the Guild of Television Cameramen, was also nominated by the RTS in 2002 for his work on the BBC's *Figaro Live*, with its unique coverage of Mozart's opera.

All this, and a wonderful globe-trotting brief with the late Jill Dando on the popular *Holiday* show, seems a long way from those childhood dreams of being a cameraman when he remembered playing with a cardboard cut-out from *Look In* magazine of the *Magpie* TV studio.

From three generations of bricklayers, Hawkins recalled how his father used to do "a lot of private work for a chap who used to work for Rank. Rather than pay cash, he once gave my dad an 8mm camera and projector, so from a very early age we had cine-film as a family. Perhaps," he reflected, "that's where the dream first came from..." ■ QUENTIN FALK

 *Garth Marenghi*, which will be aired on Channel Four in the 10pm slot from January 9, was originated on 16mm Fujicolor F-400T 8682